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When I See My Face: Painting the Portrait of Black Women Leaders in the U.S. Federal Government

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**WHEN I SEE MY FACE: PAINTING THE PORTRAIT OF
BLACK WOMEN LEADERS IN THE U.S. FEDERAL GOVERNMENT**

by

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ABSTRACT

WHEN I SEE MY FACE: PAINTING THE PORTRAIT OF BLACK WOMEN LEADERS IN THE U.S. FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

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Many Black women have chosen the federal government as their employer; a review of literature provides few studies on the Black women leaders in the federal government. Similarly, there is limited research about these women in academic settings. The purpose of this qualitative portraiture study is to explore the lived experiences of Black female leaders and the (a) challenges they face in leadership and (b) resilience strategies they use to overcome those challenges. The researcher used the portraiture methodology, which embraces traditional qualitative data sources, such as interviews and documents as well as creative expressions to include poetry, music, and art that juxtapose the American black culture. It also provides the researcher, who is also a Black woman leader in the federal government's stance. Together this rich data corpus allows one to gain a richer understanding of the Black women leaders.

Resilience theory guided analysis and the study adds to the limited research base about Black women leaders in the federal government. The portraiture methodology affords an empirical, yet creative articulation of the Black women's voices, wisdom, vision, and essence using a metaphoric blank canvas. The findings of this study support and expand upon important recent work suggesting that Black women in leadership face opposition due to the impact of implicit bias concerning their race and gender. It also retorts the need to capture Black women's leadership stories and describes how the intersection of race and gender affected their work

identities. The themes generated from this research, include advice for aspiring Black women leaders.

Overall, the research findings suggest Black women's leadership has been shaped by their mother's influence more than any other formal leader. The study demonstrates the role of forgiveness towards maintaining resilience. The Black woman's leadership experience is one that is often based on: A desire to serve others while leading them, a belief that work/life balance is essential to personal organizational sustainment, and spiritual growth through their personal journeys. Despite the opposition these women faced, they continued to pursue their goals and each achieved the honor of being the first Black woman to hold their positions.

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I dedicate this dissertation to every child with low SAT scores, no college plans, and no high school teacher who appears to believe in them. I believe you can do great things! To my grandparents who never finished high school, but taught me more about life than any learning institution did, I love you forever and I continue to share what you taught me. To my mother and father, thank you for believing in me and helping me to see who I was created to be.

To my sisters in Christ who prayed for me and cheered me on, I say to you, “Look what the Lord has done.” In the process of trying to complete this dissertation, I endured unimaginable highs and lows that delayed my completion and nearly derailed it. I learned the power of what this dissertation seeks to portray...resilience. I faced great adversity, but I am stronger and wiser because of it. I am a product of resilient men and women who showed me how to face adversity with dignity, thank you! To my husband, thank you for listening to me ramble on about this work late into the night for several years. Now that I’m done, I’ll ramble about something else. To my darling children, Summer, Autumn, and Asher you make me better and have filled my life with joy, honesty, and a reason to keep climbing life’s mountains. While I have held many titles in my life, I have no better title than that of “mama duck”.

Lastly, I owe and dedicate everything I am and ever will be to God, my Father, Jesus Christ, my Savior, and The Holy Spirit, my Professor. I don’t know if you believe in God or not, but I know for sure that he believes in you. I would not have accomplished this goal without the encouragement and strength that originated in heaven and manifested in the earth. God, you are so smart and thank you for providing your unmerited favor in my life. I dedicate every day of the rest of my life and every word that I ever speak or write in this life to you.

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For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.

—Proverbs 2:6 King James Version

To the women who bore their souls to me during this research, your humility and candor was impressive. Your compassion, love, and authenticity inspired me. The references to your mothers, grandmothers, and ancestors painted a perfect portrait of what most of us aspire to create...a legacy. I have never seen a tombstone that read “beloved employee” and doubt I ever will. Thank you for stating the importance of work/life balance. Thank you for reaffirming that some of the most important memories and leadership character traits are developed in childhood. As a working mother, it is easy to lose focus on what really matters in life and the fact that it is not found in a cubicle or a corner office with a window. I’ve sat in both and at the end of the day discovered neither of them created long-lasting happiness. I also owe gratitude to the inspiring artists whose art, poems, and music are featured inside. To Dr. Lawrence-Lightfoot thank you for painting portraits. There are many people to whom I owe gratitude for helping me to include Dr. John Ritz, Dr. George Haber, Dr. Dennis Gregory, Dr. KaaVonja Hinton-Johnson, and Dr. Philip Reed, thank you for helping me to focus.

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I learned valuable lessons during the seven years it took to complete this degree. I pray I can pass them on to the next two generations. There are many sources of inspiration in this life, but there is none greater than the God of the Bible and the people who follow him. To my creator, I say, I acknowledge your existence, your love, and your wisdom. To man I issue a final decree, I unapologetically say in accordance with Romans 1:16, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.

—Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, 1969

If asked to paint a portrait of a leader, would the metaphoric canvas display shades of tan, brown, or black as skin tones? Would the subject of this artistic representation wear a dress or a three-piece suit? According to Klineberg (2015), nothing will stop 21st Century America from continuing to become more diverse. The labor force is impacted by this diversity explosion and projections indicate an increase in minority workers through the year 2050 (Toosi, 2006). Even though the combination of faces in America is changing (Funderburg, 2013), the voice of Black women leaders is nearly silent in academic research (Collins, 2000; Davis & Maldonado, 2015, Lerner, 1992); and despite calls from Black women scholars to end the silence (Byrd, 2009; Collins, 2000).

Historically, Black women have held leadership roles in a variety of settings and have done so while experiencing adversity. Women were instrumental in the struggle for racial equality in America and served in informal and formal leadership roles to ensure it was obtained (Sanders, 2007). While enslaved literally or figuratively by cultural restrictions, Black women continually challenged the notion that she was inferior (Collins, 2000; Gaspar & Hine, 1996; hooks, 1984). Today's Black women continue to strive for racial equality in pay in the federal government. Black women make less money than their male and White female counterparts and do not reach parity in executive leadership positions (Lewis, 1998; Malveaux, 2013).

While Black women's existence has been plagued with oppression and adversity in the American culture, they have continued to share their experiences honestly in song, spoken word,

art, and dance. Nina Simone (1966) released a song entitled “Four Women” depicting the many faces of Black women’s journey through a lens of stereotypical characters epitomizing the legacy of slavery. Her raspy voice opens with the first character known as Aunt Sarah singing, “My skin is black, my arms are long, my hair is woolly, my back is strong, strong enough to take the pain, inflicted again and again. ” Each character in her song tells a tale of woe and resiliency moving from an older woman to the light- skinned daughter whose birth was the result of rape at the hands of her White father. Then the tanned-skin prostitute affectionately known as Sweet Thang croons, “Whose little girl am I, anyone with money to buy.”

The song ends with the most current African American character known as Peaches, who exclaims, “my manner is tough, I’ll kill the first mother I see ‘cause my life has been rough.” The singer takes care to describe the skin tone and hair texture of each woman as this is critical to the Black woman’s acceptance and experience in American society (Pierpoint, 2014). Both features have been sources of contention and divisiveness among Black people in general. (Coard, Breland & Raskin, 2001; Robinson, 2011; Saint Louis, 2009). Per Pierpoint (2014), this song resonated for many Black women and their struggle in America and captured long suppressed anger.

The song resulted in a ban on a couple of radio stations in New York and Philadelphia. The ban was deemed more offensive to Black women than the lyrics, and the ban was lifted soon after instantiation (Pierpoint, 2014). This was internalized as yet another attempt to silence the already demure, embattled voice of the nation’s Black women. The jazz singer’s voice and life epitomized the experience and struggle associated with being recognizably Black, based on her dark complexion, nose, and hair. (Pierpoint, 2014).

This qualitative portraiture study seeks to do what Nina Simone did through her music

(Gaines, 2013). The researcher for this study, a Black woman leader and portraitist, seeks to tell the story of the lived experiences of three Black women leaders and the nature of their resilience. The portraitist will do this by adding their collective voices and raising consciousness that emerges by not ignoring issues of race and gender situated within the community of the federal government.

As the American workforce becomes more diverse, a reasonable expectation is that leaders will also become more diverse. This anticipated growth in leadership diversity suggests increased interest and value in hearing the dialogue from diverse leaders and raises questions concerning how these perspectives might influence the future contexts of people and the workplace. The current experiences of Black women leaders will provide valuable insight to current and future leaders in government and private sectors. The paradigm of diverse leadership is a topic that has given rise to a greater focus on the perspectives of diverse leaders as researchers seek to broaden leadership literature (Chin, Desormeaux, & Sawyer, 2016).

The United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) agency is the federal agency:

responsible for enforcing federal laws that make it illegal to discriminate against a job applicant or an employee because of the person's race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy, gender identity, and sexual orientation), national origin, age (40 or older), disability or genetic information” (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission [EEOC], n.d., pg. 1).

They have been given the authority to investigate discrimination, prevent discrimination and provide leadership and guidance to the federal government to promote justice and equality. In this effort, they released a report entitled *EEOC African American Workgroup Report* (2012) that

details the struggle of African Americans in the federal government. The EEOC realized this was one side of the equation and acknowledged in-depth research is needed to better articulate ways to address the internal challenges. The EEOC stated, their report is their most recent attempt to engage the federal agency stakeholders in the establishment of a model workforce for all employees. The following seven obstacles were identified by the EEOC in the African American Workgroup Report:

- Unconscious biases and perceptions about African Americans still play a significant role in employment decisions in the federal sector.
- African Americans lack adequate mentoring and networking opportunities for higher- level and management positions.
- Insufficient training and development assignments perpetuate inequalities in skills and opportunities for African Americans.
- Narrow recruitment methods negatively impact African Americans.
- The perception of widespread inequality among African Americans in the federal work force hinders their career advancement.
- Educational requirements create obstacles for African Americans in the federal work force.
- EEO regulations and laws are not adequately followed by agencies and are not effectively enforced (U.S. EEOC, 2012, pp. 2-10).

The EEOC is attempting to end unlawful employment discrimination and seeking to promote equal opportunity, which requires analysis of federal employee's experiences and challenges concerning their efforts (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2012). Many Black women retire from the federal government, serving multiple decades in the

organization (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2014). Understanding what impacted the retention of these women may be a key factor in assisting the EEOC in accomplishment of its goals. Several Black employees stay federal employee's despite the numbers of reported acts of discrimination, discovering the reason this happens is also a goal of the EEOC (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2012).

It is apparent from the continued work done by the federal government that Black women employed by the government are faced with adversities and bias due to their race. This was evidenced in the preliminary research by the portraitist and confirmed during the study. The next section provides some background knowledge concerning the researcher, known as the portraitist and insights into why this topic was selected for further research.

Portraitist Introduction:

I vividly remember sitting in my boss's office and asking him to mentor me. At the time, I was a Captain in the military and I was the Equal Employment Manager, which made me responsible for the agencies' diversity and inclusion planning. I explained to him the difficulty minorities have in finding a mentor and the impact it can have on their leadership potential. I was preparing for the next level of leadership and yet, I did not have a mentor. He was a White male who was a highly successful leader and the most senior officer that I had daily access to, so it was a logical request.

I was not expecting what he shared with me that day, but his raw honesty is what led to the title of this dissertation and a greater appreciation for having crucial conversations. My brown skin, presumed race, and gender was always dissimilar from most of my team members, peers, and potential mentors, but no one up to that point, had dared verbalize how it impacted them. My superior's response to my request was a response that addressed my gender and race separately. It

provided me a wonderful insight into what plagues Black women seeking cross-cultural mentoring opportunities from White male leaders to no avail. He gave a thoughtful disclaimer and began to explain that he as a White man did not recognize me and that is one reason he would not have considered mentoring me.

He went on to explain, that when he looks at a White male officer sometimes he sees himself years ago and is motivated to assist him, to prepare him to achieve what he has already achieved. He then gently added that when he looks at me he does not see anything that he identifies with. He doesn't see his wife, his daughters, or any familial markers that would stand out as motivators that compel him in the manner that the young, White male did. His explanation did not appear to me racist, it is honest and his stance struck me as one of vulnerability and genuine. My perception of what he said was, I don't see my face, I don't see a face that I know, or trust, or one that I am comfortable with.

As to my gender, he postulated, "as a man I don't want the appearance of impropriety and that causes me to hesitate to mentor women." Once again, his statement from my perspective was not sexist, but truthful and I was thankful for his candor, because it helped me to frame why some women struggle to find mentors. Our conversation ended on a high note and he immediately began mentoring me and providing career advice that was invaluable in spite of his initial comments to the contrary. As I walked away from his office, I began to reflect upon who I extended knowledge to and what impact of seeing faces that looked like mine in leadership potentially had on who I invested in. Honestly it was such a rare occurrence, to see a young woman of color, I had forgotten that it was the reason I became a military officer in the first place; I wanted them to see someone who looked like them in the officer ranks.

This conversation was helpful as I continued to provide strategies to improve the diversity

efforts of the organization. Often, I would take our commander through the halls and ask him to look at the pictures on the wall. I would say, “Sir, what do you see?” He would look at all the photos of the leaders inquisitively and intensely and I would say, “Do you see anybody who doesn’t look like you?” The absence of women and people of color in leadership was a historical trend and yet, I was being asked to determine why our organization was not reaching gender and racial parity with the community in which we were situated regarding recruitment and retention efforts. These experiences led me to this doctoral work and my urgency to document the experiences of Black women leading in the federal government before they exit the organization.

Conceptual Framework

Resilience is defined as the ability to bounce back from adversity, frustration, and misfortune and is essential for an effective leader (Ledesma, 2014); the existence of resilience may be a contributing factor to the Black women who persevere in federal employment (Sanders, 2007). Resilience theory is the conceptual framework used for this research. Patterson and Kelleher (2005) developed a resilience cycle for people facing adversity. These researchers detail a four – cycle approach to resilience that includes a deteriorating phase, an adapting phase, a recovering phase, and a growing phase. Further, these researchers found leaders experience a “roller coaster effect” resulting in a series of highs and lows as they move through the four stages. Patterson and Kelleher conceptualized a model to depict the resilience cycle (see Figure 1.)

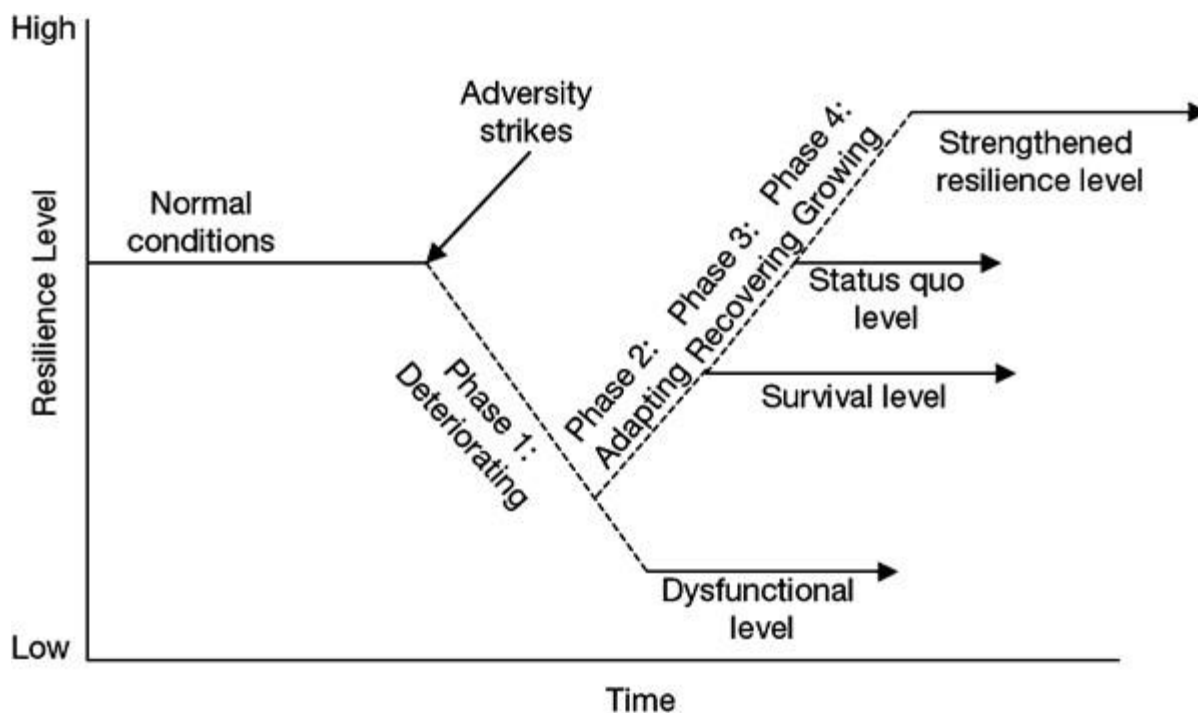


Figure 1. Graphic conceptualization of the resilience cycle Patterson & Kelleher, (2005). Reprinted with permission of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Black women have been characterized as resilient since the days of slavery and are stereotyped as being strong (Sanders, 2007). Black women have been subjected to numerous stereotypes and attacks on their self-image since arriving in America (Brown, White-Johnson & Griffin-Fennel, 2013). The portraitist, researcher chose this framework because of the proven correlation between resilience and effective leadership. Ledesma (2014) wrote that, “Researchers have found a direct relationship between the stress of the leader’s job and their ability to maintain resilience in the face of prolonged contact with adversity” (p.1). Literature reveals Black women face adversity in the American workforce (Davis and Maldonado, 2015; Roane and Newcomb, 2013; Sanders, 2007; Stanley, 2009).

Resilience theorists have shown their interest in a concept known as thriving (Carver, 1998; Ledesma, 2014). Ledesma surmised that resilient leaders move between survival, thriving

and recovery, which correlates with Patterson and Kelleher's phase two thru four: adapting, recovering and growing stages. Benefiting from the original stressor is considered a valuable part of overcoming adversity and being resilient (Ledesma, 2014). Patterson and Kelleher's model correlates with this by calling the original stressor the deteriorating stage in which no benefits are gained until the person progresses to stage two. Understanding the research participants lived experience using the resilience framework may produce insights by which other Black women could benefit from as they enter federal leadership and encounter adversity.

Methodology

This study used portraiture methodology to contribute to the limited research base about Black women's leadership experiences and challenges. A key characteristic of portraiture that separates it from other qualitative research approaches, such as ethnography, is the subtle, yet significant, distinction between listening to a story and listening for a story (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Portraiture allows the researcher, portraitist to function both as researcher following typical qualitative research and as artist who creatively paints word pictures unapologetically using one's own authentic voice and experiences to inform the work (Matthias & Petchauer, 2012). As the portraitist and a Black woman leader in the federal government, I intend to use my federal government leadership experiences as I listen for a story and as I paint this portrait. I have experiences that will lend credibility to the research, but will take conscientious steps to avoid painting a self-portrait. Utilizing in-depth interviews, poetry, photographs, music and journals, my goal as portraitist is to provide a meaningful portrait that clearly represents an accurate and creative depiction of the Black women's perspectives of leadership with respect to their experiences, challenges, and voices. The portraitist used extensive journaling, notes and memos throughout the study to ensure accuracy.

Three Black women currently serving in the same leadership position in one federal agency participated in this research with the portraitist for this study. Only Black women serving in senior leadership positions for at least three years were recruited as participants for this research and participation was voluntary. Data collection consisted of in-depth interviews and requests for authentic artistic expressions (e.g. poetry, visual arts, and musical reflections). Artistic expressions created by the participants supported the creation of personal portraits that depicted their individual experiences as Black women in senior leadership.

There were no conceivable risks to the participants, as they remained confidential during the study, by using pseudonyms at the onset of the study. The federal agency where the participants work was also unnamed; the work environment was referred to as “*a federal agency operating within the United States*.” Portraiture encourages the portraitist to add layered contexts of her personal experiences over those of the participants. This also served to obscure the participant’s identities and the specific agency where they were employed.

Research Problem

The EEOC (2012) reported, Black women continue to experience implicit bias and perceptions about African Americans held by those making employment decisions in the federal sector. “There is a stereotypical assumption (or unconscious bias) that African Americans who are in high-level positions cannot successfully perform in those positions because those positions are considered nontraditional for African Americans” (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2012, p. 3). The EEOC also noted, discrimination in employment due to unconscious bias is difficult to prove. While Black women have continued to rise above the many challenges they face in leadership, their accomplishments have not been adequately documented in literature for the benefit of next generation of aspiring leaders’ discovery

(Weatherspoon-Robinson, 2013).

The federal government has several initiatives to counteract this problem of racial disparity that ranges from affirmative action policies to diversity initiatives (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2012). This study focused on Black women leaders who have successfully achieved senior leadership positions in the federal government, those employed at the two top pay grades on the federal general pay schedule and lead to positions for Senior Executive Service (SES).

The federal government has recently identified a diversity leadership crisis as nearly 70% of its executives are eligible to retire and minorities are not positioned to fill the gaps equitably (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2014). Currently, African American men and women hold only 11% of federal executive positions per the U.S. Office of Personnel Management report (2014). This has created a human capital crisis per Senator George Voinovich (R-Ohio) in his address concerning succession planning in federal leadership (Price Waterhouse Cooper, 2006).

Even though women make up more than 50% of the U.S. population, in 2005 women were noted to have held 7 - 9% of senior leadership jobs in Fortune 1000 companies (Gamble & Turner, 2015). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (n.d.), Black women make up 13% of the U.S. population and the numbers are continuing to increase. Federal agencies are noting an increase in Black women employees, but a decrease in their obtainment of SES positions. (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015). In the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Black women make up 14.92% of agency personnel, yet less than 5% obtain SES positions. The VA is determined to alter this trend and are actively seeking to identify the barriers that prevent Black women from achieving the senior leadership positions (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs,

2015).

While Black women have achieved parity in federal employment compared to societal numbers, leadership numbers show a grim reality with Black women making up only 3.5% of SES positions governmentwide. Black women are making progress, but they are underrepresented in leadership roles across the nation (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2014). To reach parity in this area and fulfill the government's goal of having a diverse workforce, Black women who serve as senior leaders will need to seek and receive promotions. Agencies employing Black women will need to identify and eradicate equal opportunity deterrents that exist within their organization if they hope to decrease the current paucity of diverse leadership. (U.S. Department of Equal Employment Opportunity; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015; U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2014).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the lived experiences of the Black women leaders in federal service related to their (a) challenges faced in leadership and (b) strategies used to overcome those challenges. The findings from this study provide a representation of Black women leaders in the federal government using their voices and creative expressions about their leadership experiences and challenges, and add to the limited extant literature base about Black women (Gamble & Turner, 2015). Leadership literature concerning Black women is limited; however, self-reported Black women research (Brown, Haygood & Mclean, 2010; Collins, 2000; hooks, 1984) has contributed to an otherwise silent topic. Stanley (2009) contributed to the conversation and provided an account of how Black women leaders' stories are of great importance to human resources theory and practice.

To accomplish the purpose of this research, the following research questions guided this

study:

1. How do Black women leaders in federal service describe their experiences in leadership?
2. What perceived barriers or challenges do they face as leaders?
3. How do Black women leaders view the efficacy of resilience in their ability to overcome their perceived barriers or challenges?

Significance

An EEOC (2012) report detailed implicit bias as a recognizable problem in the federal government plaguing Black women. This report also noted several barriers faced by these women in their federal employment. Black women have significant racial and economic disparities affecting their success in the workplace (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Guerra, 2013; Lewis, 1998; Pina, 2001; U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Center, 2013). However, labor force projections point to a more diverse workforce through the year 2050 (Toossi, 2006), which may hold potential for a hopeful outlook for all minorities, including Black women in leadership.

This research about Black women's leadership has potential significance for a variety of disciplines and organizations. According to Guerra (2013), Black women have historically been community leaders, even though underrepresented in all levels of government, including leadership. While the federal government acknowledges the leadership gap and barriers faced by these women, there is little extant literature exploring strategies employed by successful Black women leaders (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2012). The portraitist for this study seeks to explore and represent experiences of Black women senior leaders in the federal government through the lens of resilience theory, and dissemination of the findings made available to government and private sector companies interested in nurturing and cultivating Black women for leadership roles within their organizations.

Delimitations

This study focused on Black women leaders who work in the same federal agency and position as the researcher, portraitist. There are fewer than 10 Black women leaders who hold this position within the targeted agency of the government. However, proximity (i.e., within driving distance) sampling from this population of Black women was used in addition to consideration for the physical size of their offices. These factors resulted in a diverse geographical sampling and range of experiences to render sufficient variability of experience to strengthen findings. While there are other Black women leaders in the agency, the solicited group of participants' leadership roles and environmental characteristics are homogenous.

Anecdotal information suggests that similar situations are common in other federal agencies; however, validation of this is beyond the scope of this study. Additionally, attempting to validate such is inconceivable given the sheer number of federal agencies and the limitations of a single researcher. This research will only represent leadership experiences and challenges of Black women in one federal agency. This study utilized qualitative research methodology to provide an in-depth analysis as recommended by the EEOC (2012) that addresses issues identified as salient for the federal government. Resilience theory will guide this research because it affords a model for explaining a process for leaders to face challenges and barriers and overcome them.

Definition of Terms

This section includes definitions of terms used within this study to provide common understanding for readers. The key terms in this study, include the following:

Black or African American is a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa. It includes people who indicate their race as "Black, African Am., or Negro," or provide written

entries such as African American, Afro American, Kenyan, Nigerian, or Haitian (U.S. Office of Management and Budget, 1997).

Diversity is defined as the inclusion of different types of people (such as people of different races or cultures) in a group or organization (Merriam-Webster, 2017).

General schedule (GS) is a 15-level, government-wide pay and classification system used for most of the U.S. federal workforce (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, (n.d.).

Lived experience is an experience a person has encountered in a lifetime.

Portraitist is a person who paints or draws portraits. For this study, the portraitist is creating a metaphoric picture comprised of Black women's leadership experiences (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Implicit bias is a term referring to relatively unconscious and relatively automatic features of prejudiced judgment and social behavior (Brownstein, 2015).

Race is a concept that reflects self-identification by people according to the race or races with which they most closely identify. These categories are sociopolitical constructs and should not be interpreted as being scientific or anthropological in nature. Furthermore, the race categories include both racial and national-origin groups U.S. Census Bureau, (n.d.).

Resilience is a term used to describe people who use energy productively to emerge from adversity stronger than they were at the onset (Patterson & Kelleher, 2005).

Shero is colloquial term for a woman regarded as a hero.

Senior leader is a leader who supervises supervisors and holds the federal grade of GS- 14 or 15 per the federal standards of the agency included in this study.

Senior Executive Service (SES) is a federal job classification that "consists of executive positions, including managerial, supervisory, and policy positions classified above General

Schedule (GS) grade 15 or equivalent positions in most Executive Branch agencies of the Federal Government (USA Jobs, 2017).

White is a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa. It includes people who indicate their race as “White” or report entries such as Irish, German, Italian, Lebanese, Near Easterner, Arab, or Polish (U.S. Office of Management and Budget, 1997).

Organization of the Study

Understanding the lived experiences of Black women is necessary to add a voice to the current literature (Chin, Desmureaux, & Sawyer, 2016). While the federal government is a merit-based organization, there are factors outside the written policy that impact leadership roles and experiences (EEOC, 2013). Quality senior leadership is critical to meet the demands of the government’s mission. Diversity in senior leadership is vital for recruiting and retaining highly skilled and talented individuals (Fraser, 2005). This study attempts to gain a better understanding of the outside factors experienced by the Black women senior leaders in the federal government.

The study is organized into five chapters. Chapter I contains the introduction, conceptual framework, statement of the problem, research problem, purpose, portraitist introduction, research questions, significance, delimitations, definition of terms, and the organization of the study. Chapter II contains a review of literature with specific topics and includes historical background and an overview of Black women in the federal government, overview of institutional racism, and overview of resilient Black women. Chapter III articulates the methodology that governs this research and includes the research design, role of the researcher, site and sample selections, data collection techniques, managing and recording data, data analysis procedures, assumptions, and limitations. Chapter IV includes individual narrative portraits of the three participants, a piece of

art work that embodies the essence of each participant, an original poem inspired by the women's stories, written by the portraitist and a final group narrative portrait collectively depicting the women of the study and the portraitist. Chapter V includes the results, recommendations for future study, and portraitist reflections. A collective portrait of the participants was used to explore the emerging themes. This final chapter concludes with the advice provided for aspiring Black women leaders and the portraitist's reflections on the study.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The fact that the adult American Negro woman emerges a formidable character is often met with amazement, distaste and even belligerence. It is seldom accepted as an inevitable outcome of the struggle won by survivors, and deserves respect if not enthusiastic acceptance.

—Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, 1969

Introduction

This review of literature examined empirical and some non-empirical literature to gain and increase understanding about Black women in leadership. To locate this information a wide net was cast that included non-race and race specific women studies; non-gender/race and focused leadership topics and resilience research. From this literature search it became apparent little is known about Black women leaders in the federal government. Thus, relevant literature using primary and secondary sources within the public and private sector were reviewed to gather relevant data to begin filling the metaphoric canvas for the portrait of this study.

In 2011, President Obama signed Executive Order 13583 requiring agencies implement diversity and inclusion plans and “establish a system for reporting regularly on agencies progress” (Executive Order 13583, 5 U.S.C. 2301(b)(1) (2011). The United States Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has the responsibility to lead and develop a Government-wide Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2016). Studies have shown that diversity in the workforce is necessary for high performance (e.g., Chin, Desormeaux, & Sawyer, 2016; Gamble & Turner, 2015; Malveaux, 2013). Internal studies conducted in the federal government confirm this also (e.g., U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2016; U.S. Office of Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2012).

Diversity within senior leadership is essential and identification of barriers is critical to achieving equal opportunity in federal employment (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2013; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015). The face of America is changing rapidly with increased numbers among people of color (Funderburg, 2013; Klineberg, 2015; Market, 2010; Takaki, 2008), but the face of senior federal leadership parity does not mirror this diversification or the pace of change according to the data provided in the 2014 Senior Executive Service demographics (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2014).

Black women leaders in the federal government are still making history, for example, in 2008, Lisa Perez Jackson became the first Black woman to head the Environmental Protection Agency (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2009). Many Black women have yet to achieve senior leadership roles in the government. Their stories go untold in literature; their faces have yet to show up on the framed canvases lining the walls of the American government (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2014). Their experiences are important, warrant documentation, and are currently taking place in real time; making public their voices and stories about leadership is the intent of this portraitist, researcher, through this research.

Researchers highlight the need to better understand diversity in the workplace and the obstacles associated with obtaining it (Chin, Desormeaux, & Sawyer, 2016; Stanley, 2009; Voges, 2006). Describing Black women's leadership experiences is complex, since her race, gender and social class can influence her experience (Brown, Haygood & Mclean, 2010; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). Stanley (2009) added nuance about this complexity when she stated, "Articulating the experiences of Black women is therefore needed to challenge discourses and beliefs of the dominant group that have been reinforced through traditional research and theories" (p. 554).

This literature review provides an understanding of the research associated with leadership, resiliency, the Black woman's experience, and arts based research. The goal is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the empirical knowledge concerning Black woman in leadership. The opening section will highlight leadership theory broadly, followed by a review of Black women's leadership and including specific consideration for those in federal leadership. Following this is a discussion of the theoretical framework based on Resilience Theory. This framework guides this study and provides an explanatory perspective for understanding resilient leaders. The portraitist considered this theoretical positioning, the data gathered and used an artistic-inspired method of analysis to address the research questions that govern this study relative to the Black women leaders' experiences, challenges, if they exist and the ways they dealt with them.

Leadership Theory

Defining the word "leadership" can be an arduous task that sometimes results in a nebulous description. Northouse (2013) deemed attempting to define leadership universally as a nearly impossible task. Leadership broadly defined by Merriam-Webster (2017) is referenced as having power or ability over people in order to them. Most of the narrowly defined leadership definitions are rooted in the Great Man theory of the 19th Century thinking that great leaders were born gifted with leadership (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Northouse, 2013; Raelin, 2015) and their race is described or implied as, White (Parker & Ogilvie, 1996). This theory that manifests as ideology because of cultural indoctrination asserted the leader's greatness and gifts came from their individual personalities and traits. Current leadership theory dispels this notion and makes leadership available to all who are not necessarily defined as *great*, *White*, or *men* (Greenleaf, 1998; Frankel, 2007).

In the 20th Century, numerous leadership styles surfaced broadening who could be considered a leader and how that leader may improve upon said leadership. Two of the more widely known theories are servant leadership and transformational leadership (Greenleaf, 1970; Stone, Russell & Patterson, 2004). While they both have an element of concern for the followers, they are different when it comes to the outcome of leadership. Transformational leadership concerns itself with achieving organizational outcomes, objectives, and mission while attempting to transform human capital. Servant leadership is primarily concerned with service and relationships (Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2004).

Robert Greenleaf, (1970) identified a shift in leadership, where the traditional work environment and leadership becomes more inclusive. He projected an environment based on a model of teamwork and community, where the leader would display ethical and caring behavior towards those in their employ. This type of leadership is known as “servant-leadership” (Greenleaf, 1970). Greenleaf (1998) stated the servant-leader is servant first; this leader naturally seeks to serve first and lead second. The leader, Greenleaf describes is vastly different than the typical leader hailed as the great man throughout history (Greenleaf, 1970).

Greenleaf described leadership in terms of a collective commodity in which no one was an owner of it and everyone could access it. Leadership is not just for the “chosen” few or “charismatics,” it was for anyone willing to take the risk and place others before themselves (Greenleaf, 1998). This style of leadership has been popular in faith-based settings and is typically used to describe leaders such as Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, Jr, and Mahatma Gandhi (Barnabus & Clifford, 2012; Kumuyi, 2007).

In recent years, a theory known as transformational leadership emerged when James McGregor Burns’ (1978) ideas were popularized by Bernard Bass and Bruce Avolio (1990).

There were two overarching and competing models with different motivations for leader's transactional or transformational leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1990). Transactional leadership is process or outcome focused and transformational leadership is more focused on progress and development. Conversely, transformational leaders seek to transform the values of those they lead, while achieving organizational goals and visions and develop leadership in others. Transactional leaders focus on task accomplishments and bureaucracy (Bass, 1990; Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2004).

According to 21st Century leadership theorists, leadership is a teachable skill that can change and be improved (e.g., Greenleaf, 1998; Frankel, 2007). In the book, "*See Jane lead*," Lois Frankel (2007) stated:

Some books profess to know the secrets of leadership, but my own belief is that (1) you must be a leader for your time, which means giving your followers what they need, not what you want; (2) as with the women in this book, your leadership style will emerge based on your own experiences; and (3) it's important to be a perpetual student of leadership. It's not important which leadership books you read, it's important that you read. (p.267)

Frankel acknowledges the importance of studying leadership and the necessity to pursue knowledge concerning the topic. Much of the 21st Century leadership theories appear individualized, more self- focused in nature, acknowledging a leader's personal experience, organization, and willingness to lead. These leadership theories describe a platform in which the leader emerges and imparts their leadership on employees (Maxwell, 2007; Goleman, 2005). Recently, leadership theorists have identified a request for more agile leaders, such as leaders who share leadership (Raelin, 2015), adjust leadership styles as necessary (Govindarajan &

Faber, 2016), and understand their role as it relates to the larger group (Watts, 2011).

While the origins of leadership originated with the Great Man theory, theories have evolved as the environment and the work force has changed. Research in the leadership arena acknowledges and includes ethnic groups (Chin, Desormeaux & Sawyer, 2016) as a laudable subject of study and includes them as a viable subset for research. While this research is encouraging for African American leadership, and Black women's leadership remains a narrowly examined area of research (Parker & Ogilvie, 1996; Roane & Newcomb, 2013)

Black Women's Leadership

The Black woman's road map to the executive suite and leadership experience appears to be vastly different from that of Black men and White women (Stanley, 2009). Black women have been harshly criticized while trying to raise their voice and share their experiences on womanhood in this nation dating back to the 19th century (Lerner, 1992). For example, Maria Stewart, an early abolitionist, is credited as the first known Black woman to publicly lecture about Black women's rights to a mixed audience; she accomplished this feat in 1832. Speaking only four times, she chose to give voice through writing alone due to the harsh rebuke she received from lecturing. Not to be deterred by Stewart's silence, her example and leadership led to other Black women picking up where she left off (Lerner, 1992).

Some voices refused to be muzzled and have become known as pioneers in sharing insights into Black women's thoughts, experiences, and struggles. One of those women was Sojourner Truth, who in 1853 addressed a mixed audience to defend and assert the plight of Black women (Lerner, 1992). These cultural thought leaders served to challenge the notion that Black women's viewpoints are not succinctly defined within the context of White women's thoughts, experiences and struggles (hooks, 1984; Collins, 2000).

According to Rosette and Livingston (2012), Black women endured undue scrutiny even when the organization was experiencing success. Their study reinforced that the perceptions of Black women leaders is more negative than for Black men and White women concerning organizational failure. Additionally, this study found that even in times of success, Black women were viewed less favorably when compared to White men in leadership. The results of their research suggested that Black women in leadership experience greater sanctions for making mistakes, which may create undue burdens; their findings are consistent with the findings of other researchers (e.g., Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010; Stanley 2009; Malveaux, 2013).

A perception of Black women in their quest for leadership continues to be of interest to researchers. Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) conducted a study that addressed the unique challenges and other people's perceptions of women of color. These researchers discovered, "Women of color in leadership may therefore experience triple jeopardy because of multiple stereotypes associated with gender, race, and ethnicity that they trigger in others" (p. 174). Black women experience the burden of racism and sexism and while they continue to make strides, gains made by women do not automatically apply to Black women. Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) discovered identity plays a powerful role in the workplace for Black women as they typically employ multiple identities to find acceptance; Black women have been known to have seamlessly portrayed different versions of themselves to survive in the workplace and in America (Collins, 2000; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003).

Black women seeking executive level leadership have found the path riddled with obstacles. The Executive Leadership Council (ELC) is composed of global Black leaders who are attempting to increase the number of successful Black executives. In 2008, this group conducted groundbreaking research amongst American Fortune 500 companies (Carlton, Smith,

Baskerville-Watkins, n.d.). At the time, there were no Black women executives (BWE) serving as CEO, since that time there has only been one, Ursula Burns who was the CEO at Xerox in 2009, but is no longer serving in that capacity. There is considerable work needed for Black women to achieve executive level positions, according to the ELC. This will not happen without strategic planning and continuous effort. Barriers must be identified, mentoring programs need to be established and stereotypes must be eradicated from the minds of employers and employees for Black women to be considered as contenders for executive leadership (Carlton, Smith, Baskerville-Watkins, and Carven, n.d.; Lott, 2009; Parker & Ogilvie, 1996; U. S. Office of Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2012). The ELC (2008) study was re-done by interviewing 59 of the original 76 women from the original study. The findings of the study indicated that fewer Black women than anticipated had been promoted. During 2007-2015, only 27% of participants advanced or saw promotion.

Four themes emerged when defining what made the Black women who held executive positions successful, they were (a) alignment of values; (b) agility and repurposement; (c) sponsorship; and (d) relationship-building and politics. (Carlton, Smith, Baskerville-Watkins, and Carven, n.d, pg. 7).

The lack of alignment of values was noted as the number one reason Black women left their companies; often they noted change in management or corporate strategy as a reason for the misalignment. BWE's who desired to seek new opportunities, learning assignments and career movement which was defined as agility and repurposement. Sponsorship is not the same as mentorship, and took in to account if the sponsor was internal or external to organization. Sponsorship is advocacy on behalf of the BWE when she is not present. This concept goes beyond career advice and is focused on pushing the executive's career forward and aiding in

challenging situations. Lastly, relationships and networking was the most talked about topic by all participants. BWE's viewed networks and work relationships as a success factor; while CEO's and peers saw acquiring them as a significant challenge for the BWE, who seems to have difficulty acquiring a robust network due to the constantly changing politics and competitive natures of their workplace. This study is hailed as the first longitudinal study of Black women executives in corporate America and its findings lend valuable insight into the challenges they face (Carlton, Smith, Baskerville-Watkins, & Carven, n.d.).

Black women continue to attempt to fit into the dominant culture through means of assimilation, even though many do not perceive them to fit (Gamst, Meyers, Arellan-Morales & Shorter-Gooden, 2016; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2012). We know from Gamst and colleagues and Shorter-Gooden's research that women feel compelled to alter their self-presentation in order to fit. Black women experience phenomena referred to as shifting, which is the equivalent of changing their behaviors and thoughts to fit the cultural conditions they find themselves. For example, Black women often speak two languages, one at home with family and friends that is often characterized as *slang*, and proper English in the workplace (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). Internally invisible, the shifting that transpires in Black women daily is well documented and described as leading double lives by Shorter and Jones (2003) after they assessed Black women's experiences in the American Women's Voices Project.

The prevalence of this shifting phenomenon amongst minorities led researchers to develop a scale to measure the occurrence (Gamst, Arellano- Morales, & Shorter-Gooden, 2016). While this is contemporary research, this phenomenon is not new or sporadically evidenced (Bassoppo-Moyo, 2012). This shifting has been a part of Black women's experience in America,

since they arrived on slave ships; shifting was and continues to be a means of survival. African girls and women could no longer behave with their homeland's traditions, values, or native tongue, and were forced to adopt new ways of being. Shifting continues today through familial practice in middle class families and is commonplace amongst Black professionals as a cultural norm. (Bassoppo-Moyo, 2012; Collins, 2000; Dubois, 1903; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003).

Black Women in Federal Leadership

Patricia Roberts Harris was the first Black woman to serve as a United States ambassador from 1965-1967 in Luxembourg. She was also the first Black woman to hold a cabinet appointment in the federal government in 1977 (Low & Clift, 1981). Patricia faced fierce opposition from the Republican Senators, who questioned her ability to represent the needs of the poor. Harris (1977) responded,

Senator, I am one of them. You do not seem to understand who I am. I am a Black woman, the daughter of a dining car waiter. I am a Black woman who could not buy a house eight years ago in parts of the District of Columbia. I didn't start out as a member of a prestigious law firm, but as a woman who needed a scholarship to go to school. If you think that I have forgotten that, you are wrong. (Low & Clift, 1981, p.37)

Patricia Roberts Harris paved the way for Black women leaders in the federal government, to include Shirley Chisholm, who became an outspoken advocate for people of color and women's rights. In 1968, she became the first Black woman elected to the United States Congress and in 1972, she had the honor of being the first Black person to seek a nomination for the U.S. presidency (Low & Clift, 1981). The 21st century has ushered in a wave of prominent Black women who served in the highest positions in the federal government. Dr. Condoleezza Rice, served as the nation's first Black female National Security Advisor and Secretary of State,

serving from 2005 – 2009 (Felix, 2002). Recently, Loretta Lynch made history in 2015 when she was confirmed as the 1st African American woman to hold the position of United States Attorney General (Jones, 2015). While researchers (e.g. Arellan-Morales & Shorter-Gooden, 2016; Morrison & Stein, 1984; Roane & Newcomb, 2013) have conducted research on women in leadership, more research exists concerning Black women in academia or corporate America than in the federal government.

In one of the few studies that addressed attitudes toward women in the military, the researchers noted that men held traditional beliefs concerning what roles women should hold (Matthews, Ender, Laurence, & Rohall, 2009). Despite women's increasing role in leadership, there is still great concern about their ability to lead (Matthews, Ender, Laurence, & Rohall, 2009). This study examined West Point cadets, ROTC cadets and non-military affiliated college students to determine their support of traditionally male dominated military positions. Male cadets were less supportive of women being in jobs requiring combat. The jobs they disapproved of are the very jobs that make women competitive for executive leadership positions. The research confirmed that women are serving, but suggested that they may not be considered equal in the eyes of their male peers.

Since the first Black women spoke on women's equality in the 19th century, a few Black women have stepped up to provide commentary on Black women's issues. During the 20th century, Black women scholars began to give serious study to the topic and the historical origins. Sanders (2007) noted the lack of female stories being told in the struggle for racial equality concerning Black people and as scholars began to take notice, a new notion of Black thought began to emerge. The civil rights movement in America had a profound effect on modern day rights of all minorities, not just those considered African-American. (Collins, 2000; Lerner,

1992) Little was previously documented about the contributions by Black women before and during the movement, despite many women being involved (Collins, 2000; Sanders, 2007).

This led a few 20th century pioneering Black women academics to begin taking interest in documenting the lives of Black women. bell hooks, and Patricia Hill-Collins are two such women who emerged as cultural theorists providing academic clarity concerning what the Black women's existence looked like in modern day America. Both hooks and Collins assert that Black women have an active role to play in ending sexism and both scholars sought to define Black women in a context that began with understanding their uniqueness and individuality amongst the groups they are compared with.

Black women's oppression occurred typically by a converging of factors, one being Black, another being their class and the other being female. Maya Angelou (1969) noted, "the Black female is assaulted in her tender years by all those common forces of nature at the same time that she is caught in the tripartite crossfire of masculine prejudice, White illogical hate and Black lack of power (p. 272)." Building upon Maya Angelou's assertions, Collins (2000) incorporated past historical interpretations of race, gender, and class of Black women and related them to the present. Understanding that Black women are multi-faceted, Collins sought to clarify a standpoint of and for Black women, she argues: African American women's lives remain structured at the convergence of several factors: Black community organizations reflecting principles of African influenced belief systems; activist mothering traditions that stimulate politicized understandings of Black women's mother work; and a social class system that relegates Black women as workers to the bottom of the social hierarchy. (Collins, 2000, p.259)

Collins not only addressed the dimensions of the Black woman's oppression, but defined a

“matrix of domination,” that exists in the United States. She asserted that this matrix significantly influences Black women’s lives and consciousness. hooks (1984) referenced the need for Black women to stand up against domination. She stated, “In the interest of continued struggle, solidarity, and sincere commitment to eradicating all forms of domination, sexist oppression cannot continue to be ignored and dismissed by radical political activists.” hooks (1984) and Collins (2000) provided unfettered insight into the staunch oppression Black women face in their pursuit of equality. Oppression is still experienced in current day leadership by Black women in covert and overt mannerisms (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2012).

In 2008, Michelle Obama became the first Black woman to grace the White House as a permanent resident. For eight years, she held the second highest federal government position as this nation’s First Lady. There is little to no documentation that describes her government leadership experiences as her memoirs are still being written (Slevin, 2015). What is known is that her race and gender were often referenced or targeted in the media and at times, in unflattering commentary. In 2015, television host Rodner Figueroa was allegedly terminated for referring to the First lady as a member of the cast of the “Planet of the Apes” movie (Kludt, 2015). One day, her government employment experiences will be told as her leadership experience is relevant to the narrative of Black women leaders in the federal government. According to Slevin, her work has primarily focused in the areas of obesity, education, military families and she has been a fervent opponent of inequality. Her unique perspective and knowledge of the inner workings of the federal government may serve useful to Black women currently working in federal employment. Understanding the adversity, she faced in this pioneering role and the resilience strategies she implemented could definitely benefit the federal

workforce.

Resilience Theory

The American Psychological Association defines resilience as the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress — such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems or workplace and financial stressors (APA, 2016). It means, bouncing back from difficult experiences. Webster defines resiliency as “the ability to become strong, healthy, or successful again after something bad happens” (Merriam-Webster, 2016).

Werner and Smith (1982) began the foundational resiliency theory study in 1954 which culminated with a 30-year longitudinal data release concerning multi-racial at-risk, children. The study provided the path for academic inquiry concerning what characteristics led them to being resilient people, regardless of age (Werner & Smith, 1982; Werner & Smith, 1992). Werner’s research identified and categorized the resilient qualities, one of which was being female (Richardson, 2002). The longitudinal study suggests the lack of emotional support as a devastating factor of the children’s resilience as strong social bonds seemingly produced increased resilience. Resilient girls were known to care for their younger siblings and have strong association with other female family members across multiple generation, this led Werner and Smith to issue a decree to examine the role of grandparents as “resistance resources,” to improve the conditions of children’s resilience.

Resilience theory in the workplace is a relatively new area of research (Ledesma, 2014; Richardson, 2002). Application concerning this theory is relative to various disciplines in addition to leadership, to include psychology, medicine, human development and epidemiology. Career resilience, according to Ledesma, (2014), is vital for the leader to

survive, adapt and find success in their chosen profession. This type of resilience does not require the leader to vacate the position, but can be met by the leader just remaining in place, attempting to get back to the way things were prior to the adversity and advancing through improved performance. Essentially, resiliency it is the ability to knowingly handle and endure hostile work environments (Ledesma, 2014).

Deep healing may be achieved through the implementation of resilience theory. Richardson (2002) pointed out, “For some, the metatheory of resilience and resiliency may catch the reader off guard because it is not a problem-oriented theory” (p. 307). This theory does not focus on the problem; instead it focuses on what may be gained from enduring the problem. Researchers seeking to describe resiliency characteristics tend to do so by using three waves of resiliency inquiry, which are known as the resilient qualities, resiliency process and the resilience theory. They each exist from observing the survivor and identification of survivor characteristics. The first wave described as resilient qualities is typically achieved through listings gathered assets, qualities, and possibly protective factors subjects describe. The second wave is called the resiliency process and gives insight into how the subject coped with the stress, challenge, trauma in a positive way. This process helps the researcher understand how the qualities were acquired and considers if it was a conscious or unconscious choice. Lastly, the third wave is resilience theory and deals with the energy required to achieve growth and if that growth came from one’s self or spiritual means (Richardson, 2002).

Ledesma, (2014) noted that resilience models encapsulate the descriptions of stress and the ability to adapt. Patterson and Kelleher’s (2005) resilience cycle is recommended for use when researching people facing adversity. Their cycle details what happens before the adversity

happens and follows the roller coaster ride ensuing as people navigate through what comes next. The four stages are deteriorating, adapting, recovering, and growing. The truly resilient grow despite their suffering and seem to thrive, despite the crisis. Three dimensions of resilience impact the way in which a person navigates the resilience cycle (Ledesma, 2009; Patterson & Kelleher, 2005).

While researchers classify each stage by a different name, they can be identified as 1) factors that reduce risk, such as values, 2) challenges or risk factors that prepare people for risk, and 3) interactions or energy affecting the positive outcome (Ledesma, 2009; Patterson & Kelleher, 2005). Each stage is relevant and personal to the individual and incorporates their experiences, values and life skills. Richardson, (2002) concluded,

A succinct statement of resilience theory is that there is a force within everyone that drives them to seek self-actualization, altruism, wisdom, and harmony with a spiritual source of strength. This force is resilience, and it has a variety of names depending upon the discipline. (p.313)

Defining resilience and the stages provide a context in which the Black women leader's resilience may be examined and explored.

Black Women's Resilience

Black women have displayed resilience in America from the moment they arrived on slave ships (Gaspar & Hine, 1996; White, 1999). Too often, their stories die with them or get a notable mention in the written history of White historical figures legendary tails of triumph. (Lerner, 1992; White, 1999). Mammy Kate, who is given the distinction of being the first Black woman honored as a patriot in the American Revolution's story is not widely known. After being kidnapped from Africa and sold into slavery as a child, she and her slave husband, Daddy Jack

rescued the Governor of Georgia, Stephen Heard from death by hanging, which was the sentence given to Governor Heard for treason in 1779 (Barnes, 2012; Ford, 2011). Mammy Kate's ability to overcome the personal tragedy and oppression of slavery is missing from the pages of history (Lerner, 1992; White, 1999). While Governor Heard's life, leadership and rescue is celebrated in the history of the Sons of the American Revolution, Mammy Kate's life, leadership, and heroism were not until 2011, despite the gallant nature of the rescue mission led by her (Barnes, 2012; Ford, 2011).

According to the U. S. Army (n.d.), Black women have served in every known American military conflict dating back to the Revolutionary War in some capacity. They endured discrimination and hardship, risked personal safety, and even enlisted as men in the U.S. Army during wartime. Shortly after the Civil War, Cathay Williams enlisted as William Cathay on November 15, 1866 making her the first known Black women to serve in the military (U.S. Army, (n.d); Tucker, 2002). Black women worked for the federal government in support of the war efforts, yet were often volunteers or nurses.

According to one of the first Black female military officers, Lt. Col Charity Early (1989), sex and race were difficult barriers for her to overcome and she felt between the two, race was the most difficult (Early, 1989). During World War II, inequality was commonplace in the military for Black women." LTC Early reported first hand obstacles still reported by many modern Black women leaders (Early, 1989). Carlton, Smith, Baskerville-Watkins & Carven (n.d.); Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). Her leadership experience was one in which she fought against repulsion of her presence in leadership circles and demanded respect from White men and women. (Early, 1989). This experience albeit 74 years ago, parrots the experience of many Black women in modern day leadership (Rosette & Livingston, 2012; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis,

2010; U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2012).

On January 2010, the Director of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission tasked a workgroup to identify what obstacles continue to exist in the federal government influencing equal employment opportunity barriers for African Americans. Based on the EEOC African American Workgroup Report, Black employees in the federal government continue to report they work in perceived hostile work environments. The report lists this as an obstacle, which needs resolution. The report defines this obstacle in federal employment as, “the perception of widespread inequality among African Americans in the federal workforce hinders career advancement.” (p.11). The most recently published results from the Career Advancement Survey, reported 56% of African American employees noted “great” to “moderate” discrimination on the job, with 15% experiencing “significant” discrimination at work (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2012).

Black women continue to experience discrimination in America and the federal government, yet continue to serve. They continue to display resilience in their daily workplaces and lives (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). The trauma experienced during slavery did not silence all Black women voices, their condition did not define their character as many went on to fight for Black women’s rights and were active in the fight for equality (Lerner, 1992). In the 19th Century Elizabeth Stanton, a White woman who was known for her work concerning women’s inequality describes the condition of Black women when she wrote “The Black woman was outcast: as a woman, because of her ethnicity and her lack of education” (Sanders, 2007). This century; however, yielded several noteworthy Black women leaders worth noting for their resiliency and success including Sojourner Truth, Frances Harper, Harriett Tubman and Mary Church Terrell who continued to move forward in the face of oppression and tragedy (Adams,

2015; Sanders, 2007). The story concerning resilience of the modern Black women is still being written and contemplated by scholars (Early, 1989; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010; Slevin, 2015).

Use of Creative Works in Qualitative Research

Portraiture is an art based qualitative research method. While it shares some of the typical characteristics of ethnography, case study and narrative, it incorporates strategic elements of the arts (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). This encourages the portraitist to use imagery, illustrations, original prose, structure and improvisation that are absent in most scholarly work. Portraiture blends literary principles, narratives, artistic character, while holding true to scientific rigor and affords the portraitist substance for developing the multi-faceted contextual layers. The portraitist uses this approach to capture the human experience, organizational life and complexity of her subjects while exercising creative scholarly discourse (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

The portrait, a metaphorical thick narrative, relies heavily upon the relationship between the portraitist and her participants to construct, draw, and shape their portrait. These relationships require connection, access, trust, and intimacy, as they evolve. The portraitist relies heavily on her ability to gather enough information to paint an accurate and metaphorically complex picture. Portraiture seeks authenticity from participants to capture their essence and allowing the final metaphorical portrait to speak for itself. This requires the portraitist to employ creative methods that elicit responses, memories, and feelings (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Music and visual elicitation is a social science research tool, employed by qualitative methodologists, and known for extracting authentic data from the affective domain. For example, Allett, (2010) posited music provides a means from which to gain access to the feelings, sensory experiences and affective memories of respondents. Music elicitation is a manner from which to

gain data that may be less accessible through other methods, such as, interview. Allet, further theorized that music has been less prominent in social science research and its efficacy for revealing authentic data; however, music is central in the Black community and culture at large (Bassoppo-Moyo, 2012). Music elicitation does not seek to make the music data, which must be collected and analyzed; it seeks to make itself a conduit through which memories, experiences, and feelings flow from participant to portraitist.

Music, known to impact moods, maintains desired states and impacts bodily energy (Allet, 2010; Bassoppo-Moyo, 2012), and influences memory of events, tragedies and past occasions. Allet conducted her research of the affective attachments to Extreme Metal music using music elicitation. Two of 10 research meetings involved music elicitation and resulted in rich descriptions that encouraged stimulating conversations unlike that of sessions that did not use this method.

Visual elicitation is one way in which researchers seek to capture the identity of their participants during interviews. This emulates music elicitation as visuals are known to elicit and trigger memories (Allet, 2010). Capturing the identity of the Black community is known to be a complex photograph to take according to W.E.B. Dubois (1903). In the *Souls of Black Folk*, Dubois described the concept of “double consciousness” amongst Black people living in America. This double consciousness essentially described Black people’s ability to see inside and operate within two worlds, while White people only exist in their one world

A well-recognized concept used to identify the racism, classism and sexism faced by Black women is identified as “intersectionality.” Kimberle Crenshaw (1991) defined intersectionality as “the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women’s employment experiences” (p. 1242). Intersectionality is

frequently explored when trying to describe the Black woman's experience in America, even if the term itself, coined by Crenshaw is not used (Chin, Desormeaux, & Sawyer, 2015; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Stanley, 2009). This makes visual elicitation an optimal resource in this endeavor to provide an accurate account of Black women's leadership identity (Butler, Finnear, Doherty, and Hill, 2014). Butler, Finnear, Doherty, and Hill (2014) incorporated visual methods in the exploration of identity and work. The researchers acknowledged the difficulty in gathering identity of employees through traditional interviews, which led them to use visual figurative character images (FCI) in the form of cartoon like images as a method for self-identification. The researchers found this approach was highly effective as it capitalized on the power of visual representation that was more explicit than words alone. The FCI technique led to more lively, emotional, and deeper discussion; the results noted that the approach was relevant to organizational life and leadership studies (Butler, Finnear, Doherty & Hill, 2014).

Maynard and Cahnmann-Taylor (2010) described past uses of poetry, the challenges associated with its use in scholarly works and the possibilities it possesses in enhancing research. The use of poetry is surfacing regularly in scholarly works, with diverse methodological styles and techniques to report findings. The origins of the use of poetry to describe lived experiences began in anthropological studies, by ethnographers (Maynard & Cahnmann, 2010). Ethnography is the systematic study of people and cultures. Ethnographic poetry allows one to use free verse poetry and other forms of creative prose to share emotions more readily.

As the popularity of this technique has increased, it has come under scrutiny concerning its usefulness in research. Maynard and Cahnmann-Taylor (2010) encouraged the use of ethnographic poetry as a means of seeking insight instead of only seeking information. Validity is accomplished

when the researcher describes “true” experiences and provides good poetry to add feelings and aesthetic excellence instead of limiting expression to facts alone within studies. Maynard and Cahnmann, (2010) stated, “Poetry and poetic prose demand the use of all our senses and finely-honed language and form to convey our experiences of other people and –even more audaciously to explain why human beings think and act the way they do” (p. 14).

The use of arts based research techniques lend an additional layer of data gathering and analysis throughout the qualitative research processes. Portraiture is a research methodology intended to serve as a bridge in which one sees clearly between “the art in the development of science and the science in the making of art” (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997, p. 3). According to several researchers, the arts based research techniques aids the researcher to not only gain a deeper understanding of their participants and topics, but provide a better explanation of the results (Allet, 2010; Bassoppo-Moyo, 2012; Butler, Finniear, Doherty & Hill, 2014; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

CONCLUSION

A quick search on the Barnes and Noble website for books related to leadership yielded return of 17,450 sources. The same search for books concerning women and leadership resulted in 382 sources. A search using Black women and leadership in the search engine yielded a choice of six books and changing the descriptor to African-American women, and leadership only yielded a result of 11 sources. While traditional leadership research focuses on White males and their experiences, the increase in the nation’s diversity necessitate the need for new leadership theories and thought. Research in this area will increase as the face of leadership changes.

Inclusion of Black women’s experiences are rare in historical and current literature

(Patton, 2009). Black hands, minds, or souls do not write much of the Black woman's historical narrative (Lerner, 1992; White, 1999). Black women's life stories have been diluted and filtered by various interpretations and rarely were approved for publication or circulation (Lerner, 1992). The lack of literature concerning the American Black woman's leadership experiences and her resilience in doing so leads to the importance of this study.

Ledesma (2014) suggested that future research is needed to determine what coping skills could be developed within leaders inside their organization that helped them to lead effectively. This research proposes to provide coping skills implemented by Black women federal leaders. This research will provide Black women's voices, their insights and wisdom by extracting it using an art-based approach. This approach will allow their voices to be heard, and their images to be seen. Not only are there a limited number of stories about Black women, there is a limited number of researchers exploring Black women's lives (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003) and few Black women researchers (Carlton, Smith, Baskerville-Watkins, & Carven, n.d.). The next chapter describes the data collection, analysis, and details the rationale for the methodological choices made.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Words mean more than what is set down on paper. It takes the human voice to infuse them with shades of deeper meaning.

—Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, 1969

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of Black female leaders in federal service related to their (a) challenges faced in leadership and (b) resilience strategies used to overcome those challenges. The portraiture methodology was selected because it connects science and art, which was an appealing methodology for this study (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Specifically, the portraiture methodology provides insight into the complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of several Black women's human experience and professional lives as leaders in the federal government.

According to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, (1997), the portraiture methodology allows the portraitist, researcher, “to record and interpret the perspectives and experiences of the people they are studying, documenting their voices and their visions-their authority, knowledge and visions” (p. 14). The researcher is known as a portraitist, per Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997), tasked to construct a metaphorical representation based upon the data collected. The finished product is akin to a photograph or portrait of the participants. The goal of this study was to capture each of the women's stories using her voice, while painting a comprehensive portrait of their professional experiences as senior leaders in the federal government. Worth noting as significant, this research was conducted by a Black woman senior leader situated in the same federal agency as the participants. This resulted in the participant's recognition of the researcher as credible, easily established rapport and

development of mutual trust, which afforded profoundly, rich and intimate conversations from the start.

Research Design

According to Denzin and Lincoln (1997), qualitative research involves a collection of a variety of empirical sources, including accounts of personal experiences, documents, and spoken or visual artifacts that describe routine, cultural, and problematic moments that shape meanings in people's lives. Further, they posited qualitative research should not be limited to predetermined variables, but allow for the emergence of key ideas, as data collection and analysis throughout the process. These ideas are especially germane for portraiture. Case study, a qualitative method like portraiture, is an "empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life content" (Yin, 1994, p. 23). Narrative analysis is a method in which "researchers collect descriptions of events or happenings and then configure them into a story using a plot line" (Creswell, 2007, p. 54). The outcome of portraiture method is like narrative analysis and case study in its aim to interpret and share other people's stories and experiences accurately (Creswell, 2007).

Portraiture method is unique in that it seeks to generate the participants' wisdom and knowledge while drawing an in-depth image of the individual or the organization, within their real-life content. This methodology encourages the portraitist to use introspection and self-narrative and encourages the use of the self-portrait as conversation (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). The portraitist's intent was to expand upon her relevant experiences, emotions, and thoughts as a Black woman, senior leader, in the federal government and include them in the portrait at the point of convergence with the participant's admissions. This qualitative portraiture study provided an opportunity to gather experiences of Black women in federal

government leadership explicitly created opportunities for candid conversations that otherwise would not occur in the work place. As well as offered an opportunity for individual creative expressions with poems, music, and drawings. Portraiture was selected because it offers the opportunity to develop a narrative that is interpretively accurate, convincing, authentic, and includes complexity and nuance because of the artistic research methods and portraitist's identity, synergy, and understanding.

Portraiture records the overt and hidden details of one's experiences. Black women contend with having multiple identities, one for the work place and one for home (Dubois, 1903; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010); the portraitist for this study sought to blur the lines across identities among participants and self to strengthen the final portrait. Essentially, the intention for this research was to provide a venue for participants to retell their leadership stories, reflect upon their assumed resilience and provide advice for aspiring Black women leaders.

The portraitist set a goal to ensure Black women knew their story of struggle, triumph, and perseverance would not go to the grave with them. This was thoroughly explained to each participant during the initial interview. Other people working in the federal government might benefit from the leadership experiences, including men and White women presented in this research report. This research is important research for the next generation of Americans, especially because future generations will be more diverse (Funderburg, 2013; Toossi, 2006).

This study was guided by and addressed the following research questions:

1. How do Black women leaders in federal service describe their experiences in leadership?
2. What perceived barriers or challenges did they face as leaders?

3. How do Black women leaders view the efficacy of resilience in their ability to overcome their perceived barriers or challenges?

Role of the Researcher

Denzin and Lincoln (1997), defined the qualitative researcher's role as one who "may take on multiple and gendered images; scientist, naturalist, field-worker, journalist, social critic, artist, performer, jazz musician, filmmaker, quilt maker, essayist" (p. 4). The role of the portraitist is that of an investigator attempting to gather facts, data, experiences, feelings, and actions, and accurately depict them. More explicitly, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) suggest the researcher's role is to "create the aesthetic whole, then, work to construct a credible story—putting pieces together to create a logical coherence, but being careful not to impose a facile consistency or a simplistic logic that will misrepresent the complex reality we are documenting" (p. 246). The portraitist acknowledges her passion for this topic stems from her personal experiences as a Black woman and her former leadership position in the federal government in the same agency as the participants. The researcher is also motivated to complete this research because of the potential for benefitting women of color, as well as making explicit opportunities for expanding leadership diversity and inclusion in the federal government.

As a Black woman leader in the federal government, I have had a series of highs and lows. I have held positions in which I was warmly embraced and celebrated and then I have worked in settings that people gasped as I was being introduced to them. When I became a senior leader in the federal government, I was not prepared for the resistance I would face due to my race and perhaps compounded by my gender. It was blatant, unrestrained, even verbalized and I had not encountered such cultural opposition in previous leadership positions. The adversity tested my resilience, but simultaneously ignited a passion that would result in this important work.

Understanding the issues faced by leaders in this particular position within the federal government provided the portraitist intimate knowledge that other researchers would not have had. As a researcher, I understood the potential added limits and stigmas placed on the Black women leaders serving in this position. While holding this position, as a Black woman added a layer of stress that my White counterparts did not have to contend with, which made the resilience of the Black women in this position of great interest to me. For example, I sought assistance from my peer network to resolve workplace issues, but typically had to also make an additional call to seek support for the diversity aspects related to issues I faced.

It's not that my White counterparts were unwilling to assist with the diversity issues, they just didn't know how. What advice could they lend; they didn't understand it themselves and were often embarrassed as I shared my struggles. They considered me a counterpart and were surprised at the racial discord and unconscious bias that existed in my workplace. Many of them received the same complaints I did, without the assertion that it was due to their race or at times gender. Even though I was facilitating leadership development programs for the agency and coaching other leaders, I was viewed through a colored, stained glass by several of my employees, who continually monitored my interactions with minority employees.

I had been very successful in the military and this civilian position was the culmination of past successes. My story had not been captured anywhere and I was sure that other Black women's stories were not captured either. The stories were only told as oral histories mostly to family members, but these fade quickly over time and are not wide spread. Midway into this leadership assignment, I decided that I would no longer suffer in silence, but I would use my voice and research to provide greater insights into Black women's leadership stories. When I began this research, I was actively leading a unit of 25 people, but by the time I finished the research, I had

embarked upon a career change.

For six years, I held the same senior leadership position as the women who participated in this research study. I am well versed with the trials that come along with this position, the organizational structure, the importance of the position, and the experience of being the only racially diverse member of the executive leadership team. I have been a part of the network of professionals who hold the position, which entailed annual conferences, meetings, and regional networking events. The leaders in this study were at the agency prior to my arrival and I had previously met and worked with two of the participants and had only heard of the third participant from her previous affiliation with the network. This senior leadership position has multi-tiered leadership responsibilities and is currently acknowledged within the organization as structurally problematic due to a lack of program ownership and accountability.

This research led me to pursue another federal position to better support leaders and pursue leadership through educational and academic means. This research project is born from my experiences, memories, and questions derived from being a Black woman leading in the federal government. While portraitists may have an idea of the portrait they visualize in their mind or want to paint, they are careful not to paint a self-portrait. While I am intimately familiar with leadership, theoretically and practically, and the experience of being a Black woman in America, I have taken great care to tell each woman's story authentically as they provided it.

Site and Participant Selections

According to the U.S. Department of Labor (n.d.), the federal government is the nation's largest employer, with this honor comes the responsibility to promote equal opportunity in its hiring practices and work environment (U.S. Department of Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2012; U.S. Department of Labor, n.d.). Millions of Americans are employed across

every state and level of government. Black women make up 10.6% of the federal workforce, but only 3.5% of Black women have achieved senior executive service (SES) levels (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2014). Federal employees holding the top tier grade level positions, such as GS 14 & 15, in the federal government are the pipeline for SES positions. Each of the participants in this study are eligible for SES positions, by virtue of their federal grade level, expertise, and current position. Black women who currently or recently were senior level leaders were the targeted population in this proposed research.

Three Black women in one federal agency agreed to participate in this study. The women participating in this study and the portraitist all worked in one federal agency operating in the U.S. at the time the research started. They all held the same position in different geographical locations, in three different states and each of the women were in close regional proximity (i.e. driving distance) to the portraitist to allow for more intimate, face-to-face, and in-person interviews in multiple states. One woman was selected who led a large size metropolitan area office, a mid-size suburban area office, and a small central office function based upon the agency's office demographics. Each woman was responsible for a minimum of twenty-five employees and supervised mid-level managers in her federal agency. The work performed in these offices and the programs the women supervised are very similar in nature and the reporting structure was similar in that each woman reported directly to a senior executive in the office.

The rationale for using a small sample size is directly due to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis's (1997) portraiture methodology, which recommends a single researcher select a smaller group to ensure they have time to develop relationships and trust. Portraiture seeks to provide convincing and authentic portraits of its participants that rely on the portraitist's immersion in its participant's gestures, voice and attitudes. The authenticity of portraiture research is directly

related to the relationship built during the study (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997).

Qualitative researchers generally target smaller numbers of participants that represents the diversity of the phenomenon under study within the population (Jansen, 2010). According to Patton (2009), qualitative researchers usually use fewer participants than quantitative researchers, due to expenses and time associated with the research. The qualitative method of Portraiture, according to its creators, “blends the curiosity and detective work of a biographer, the literary aesthetic of a novelist, and the systematic scrutiny of a researcher” (p.15). This requires time for the portraitist to collect, analyze, and accurately create the “aesthetic whole” for each portrait. Portraiture is an attempt to convey the human experience of the artist and the participants; it incorporates the portraitist experiences within the metaphoric canvas created.

The selection process for participation in this study used regional convenience sampling, considering the availability of Black women federal leaders. The potential participants for this study were Black women who reside in different states that are geographically within driving distance from the state where the portraitist resides. The portraitist met with the women participants for this study in settings outside their workplace, each interview was held in a local library. The portraitist believed this would assist in building trust and create an environment in which the participant felt comfortable to share their experiences. Relationship building is a primary component of the portraiture methodology and is critical to successful data collection (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Data Collection Techniques

The primary data for this study includes documents and interviews, enhanced by creative artifacts, such as artwork, poetry, journaling, and music. Data was collected from one-on-one interviews, phone call follow-ups, journal assignments, the portraitist impressionistic journal and

organizational document reviews. The portraitist created field notes during audio/video recorded interviews and other interactions with participants and to capture personal reflections. Field notes captured the portraitist's in the moment impressions that were unanticipated, surprising, or interesting and deemed worthy of remembrance. These thoughts, as well as feelings and interpretations inspired by interactions with participants were captured throughout the study and stored within a paper research journal. Often, the participant's inspired poetry and the portraitists wrote that down on paper and in her notes.

This portraitist's journal reflects her voice, grounded by the aforementioned theoretical positioning, her identity as a Black woman leader and informed by her interpretations, reflections about biases and critical questioning. Portraiture considers voice as a witness, interpretation, preoccupation, autobiography, discernment of other voices and in dialogue (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997). The portraitist's voice is responsible for guiding the research and reporting the findings. Collection of data from multiple sources creates a richer, deeper portrait of the women and provides insights into their historical past, present, and practical plans (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Data was collected from one-on-one interviews, phone call follow ups, journal assignments, the portraitist impressionistic journal and organizational document reviews.

Artistic expressions gathered from poetry, music, and art were used to access less explicit thoughts and ideas related to aspects of their lives and experiences. Since numerous pieces of art work were included in this dissertation the portraitist sought permission from the artists to include their artwork. The use of these mediums garnered rich themes that were used to draw out data past memories and feelings during the in-depth interviews (Schafer, Zimmerman & Sedlmeier, 2014; Allet, 2010; Bassoppo-Moyo, 2012). The research incorporated music and visual elicitation, and ethnographic poetry to supplement the more familiar and traditional

qualitative data collection approaches, which are interviews and documents. Prior to the face-to-face interviews, the portraitist provided visual and auditory modalities through the journal assignment in order to allow for a well-prepared response in the initial interview.

Interviews

Interviewing was the primary method for data collection used in this study, because it allowed the portraitist to record the participants' perspectives (Patton, 2002). The portraitist conducted face-to-face interviews with the participants using a list of guiding questions (see Appendix A) as a starting point for the semi-structured in-depth interviews. The interview questions were primarily open-ended to encourage participants to speak freely and at times broadly. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis described "the portraitist enters the field with a clear intellectual framework and guiding research questions, but fully expects (and welcomes) the adaptation of both her intellectual agenda and her methods to fit the context and the people she is studying" (p. 186). The researcher asked additional questions beyond those documented in Appendix A.

The portraitist gave a detailed explanation concerning the purpose and the goals of this study without explaining the researcher's personal barriers and challenges at the onset of the study. Amongst the target population of the federal agency leaders, mutual respect and trust already exists from previous conferences and interactions and because I was a Black woman leader within the agency, there was an added element of camaraderie. During the research, the portraitist improved upon these relationships with regular e-mails and impromptu phone calls appropriate for each participant and based on her relationship with the researcher.

The portraitist asked additional questions and interacted conversationally as needed to extract detailed and pertinent information and experiences from the participants. The interviews

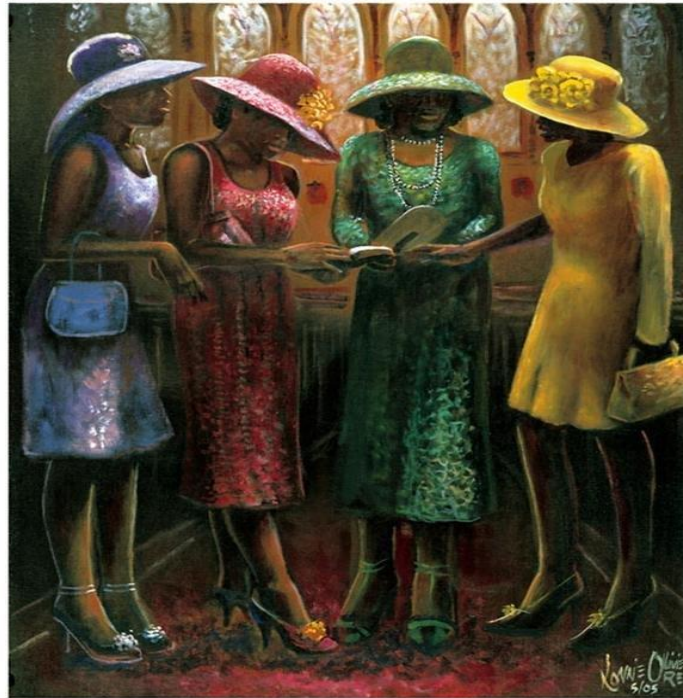
were audiotaped and videotaped, with field notes generated before, during and after each interview to ensure accuracy of participant utterances; the notes were also used to inform emergent questions. The data generated from interviews was stored in the portraitist's home office where access is limited, monitored, and restricted. Additionally, the content of what was said between the portraitist and participants were held in strict confidence by limiting access to the data recordings to the portraitist only.

Interview questions focused specifically on leadership experiences, perceived barriers, and strategies considered or used to overcome barriers. This line of questioning resulted in an interpretive plateau upon which the portraitist constructed an accurate metaphorical picture that clearly depicted an authentic and creative view of the lived experiences of each participant. The answers provided to the interview questions easily wrought a course of conversation that was extrapolated to be representative of Black women leaders in the U.S. Federal Government experiences. Individual interviews allowed each person's story to be uninhibited by hearing another's experiences.

An initial 30-minute introductory session by phone or email with each participant was held a week before the 90-minute face-to face interview, to allow time to set expectations and to answer any questions. Face-to face interviews were conducted for the initial interview and phone interviews were conducted for follow-up questions. Prior to the first interview, the portraitist personally reached out to each participant with an information packet that explained in detail requests for the written journal assignments. The interviews were analyzed using NVIVO software and the portraitist listened to the audio and watched the video numerous times until there were no additional emergent themes. The portraitist's impressionistic journal included accurate reflections, thoughts and details of the interviews and was reviewed regularly in search

of confirming or disputing evidence.

Setting the interview stage



SUNDAY CONVERSATION

LONNIE OLLIVIERRE

Figure 2. *Sunday Conversations* by Lonnie Ollivierre, (n.d.)

Black art work was a significant part of this study, I spent hours looking at a variety of artwork at a local art gallery and art-focused websites to understand the lines, contrasts, colors, textures, and the significance of what the artists conveyed concerning Black people and their stories on the canvas. I came across a portrait titled, “*Sunday Conversations*” (figure 2) by Atlanta artist, Lonnie Ollivierre (n.d). This painting depicted my study in a variety of ways. The painting beautifully detailed what I hoped to do with my dissertation. I intended to unite four Black women with a common experience and environment together to share their stories. While

the women have much in common, they are unique and must be allowed to display their individuality. While I start my portraiture with a metaphorical blank canvas, I had an image to provide me inspiration of what I hoped to achieve with this body of work. I had this portrait framed with what I considered resilience. It was a sturdy, golden brown frame with strong lines running through it.

I turned this portrait into a signature piece and opened each interview up with it sitting on an easel as a visual for the women to see as I explained the intent of the research. It was a wonderful ice breaker and provided an instant connection with each participant. Conversations were generated concerning the women in the portrait and insight was gleaned about each woman as they saw aspects of themselves from Olliverre's (n.d) *Sunday Conversations* (figure 2). One of the women even pointed out which image she believed represented me during our limited time together. I was pleasantly surprised concerning the positive impact this one image made upon the study, the initial tone set for the interview and the participants.

Documents

A foundational document collected was the federal position description, which outlines the duties and responsibilities for the participant leaders in this study. Additionally, each participant was asked to provide a copy of their organization chart that shows them in relation to others within their agency structure. Leaders in this federal agency are required by policy to conduct an annual climate survey to identify strengths and weaknesses as perceived by those they lead. The policy stipulates that all leaders with five or more employees administer the survey, and the leader receives a written report of the findings that includes written comments and graphical displays. The portraitist collected the participants' most recent climate survey report to illuminate leadership challenges perceived by others. The position description

documents and the climate surveys provided substantive insight concerning the workplace culture under which the participant leaders operated within and garnered resolute perceptions held by others within their structural proximity.

Journal Writing

Participants were asked to create four journal entries at a minimum, which provided an additional form of data collection. They responded to journal questions after the introductory meeting, and before the in-depth interview and the follow-up question session. Each woman chose a female superhero (shero) that resonated most with her at the onset of the research, the chosen shero and her significance was discussed during the in-person interviews. This shero's name became the fictitious name that identifies each participant during the study for anonymity. The journal entries are as follows:

1. Select your “shero” and explain why you identify with her.
2. Which Nina Simone character in the song “Four Women” evokes the most feeling from you as a Black woman and describe in detail why.
3. Select or create two images that visually articulate who you are as a leader. The first image is a self-image and the second image is how you perceive others view you. Compare and contrast the images and your feelings towards this in your journal.
4. Select the poem that resonates with you the most based on your life experience. If none of them does, then write an original poem to describe your leadership journey.

The journal writings lent additional data to the research and enriched the interview process by giving the portraitist a glimpse into the participant's thinking and experience prior to the actual

interview. The documents in addition to the interview data and the agency document review increased trustworthiness of the analysis.

Music, Art and Poetry

Prior to the interview, and after document collection, each participant was asked to listen to Nina Simone's song "Four women" and then select which woman they felt epitomized their leadership journey. This served as the foundational journal entry and was discussed during the in-depth interview. Participants were encouraged to identify a song of their choosing that most symbolically represents some aspect of their leadership journey. Nina Simone's song was used as a sample song, due to the lyrics that definitively describe four archetypes of Black women in America. Music gives insight into how people felt at that moment they heard the music. These memories can be recalled upon hearing the music again. Schafer et.al (2014) asserted "*to understand the evaluation of emotional intensity of past musical experiences it is useful to explore how people retrospectively remember and evaluate past affective experiences of long duration and varying affective intensity in general*" (p. 2). Asking participants to reflect upon the musical selection provided an additional layer to describe the Black woman individually and potentially collectively.

Artwork is as an additional source of data leveraged in this study. Each woman provided two original images of herself in the form of a portrait. They were given the option to use original drawings, actual photos, digital images, or imagery that represents how they see themselves. They provided two distinct portraits concerning how they believe the world, including their employees; view them as a leader and another portrait displaying how they view themselves and their leadership. These visual displays were used to spur conversation and deeper exploration, thus resulting in better refined explanations during the interview

phase.

A menu of four poems (Appendix D) by Black women was given to each participant to review and determine which one most closely describes their feelings, thoughts, or experiences. Participants made this their final journey entry. They had the option to write their own poems, if they felt inspired to do so. This original poetry was optional, but highly encouraged as it may have allowed for a valuable glimpse into the Black woman's journey and psyche. Original poetry of the portraitist was written during data collection and analysis to provide a poetic ethnography of the subject and the participants. This technique has its roots in anthropology and attempts to share participant characteristics and descriptors using poetry (Maynard & Cahnmann, 2010).

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis involved a review of the collected data, which was in turn used to identify themes. Comparison of themes and similarities yielded formative and summative data for analysis and conclusions. Interview recordings were coded using ongoing coding and iterative cycles (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997). Ongoing coding guides the portraitist ensuring they continually reflect upon the individual searching for emergent themes and gaining a better understanding of the events, processes, and interactions with the participants. Ongoing coding requires analysis, examination, and comparison of the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Continual comparison of the data was leveraged to refine and develop emerging themes. Glaser and Strauus, described this process that guided the portraitist's data analysis as the constant comparative analysis method. They pointed out the value of writing as a mechanism to focus the analysis. Constant comparative analysis is defined as "the process of taking information from data collection and comparing it to emerging categories" (Creswell, 2007).

Emergent themes are discovered from data gathering and synthesis and depend upon the portraitist's reflections and insights (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997). Portraiture allows the researcher to function both as researcher (following typical qualitative research protocols) and as artist (creatively painting word pictures and unapologetically using one's own authentic voice) (Matthias & Petchauer, 2012). The portraitist was guided by daily analysis and synthesis, reflection, journaling, and memoing during her attempt to paint the portrait ensuring the metaphorical texture and lines were accurate.

I maintained an impressionistic journal that I reflected on patterns, ideas, and development of the phenomena. I listened for metaphors of cultural and societal frameworks to include in the presentation of data. Information gained from the document review was coded for themes to be later reported for understanding agency expectations (Creswell, 1997). NVIVO, software was used to analyze the data corpus comprised of documents, video recordings, journal assignments and memos. NVIVO is a software package that analyzes text, audio, or video and documents.

The participant's artwork was analyzed using contrasts to determine how the participant viewed themselves balanced by how others viewed them. The climate survey became an important tool to assist in this effort, providing an external realm of speculation to view the leader from. The other artistic expressions such as poetic and musical reflections were analyzed for symbols, values, visions, and metaphors. All the data collected became leverage able for gaining context and was used as a piece of the participant's whole story. The interviews and the candid narrative produced emerging/overarching themes and storylines from which I began painting the portrait.

The data analysis began with an exploration of the text; ongoing coding and memoing

began by searching for patterns in the method recommended by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997). After each interview and the collection of creative expressions, the portraitist carefully reflected on her experience, observations and feelings during the interview. The portraitist created memos and journal notes to capture these expressions. Strauss and Corbin (1990), define memoing as the writing down of ideas about evolving theory. The ideas may be in the form of a hypothesis, emerging categories or some aspect of the connection of categories. Self-reflective and analytic memos were included in data analysis that documents the portraitist's reactions to the Black women's narratives and the portraitist's musing, questions, and speculations about the data (Creswell, 2007).

Once fieldwork was completed, I began to analyze the data. The data analysis is defined by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis as "when the researcher sits and sifts through the interview transcripts, observational narratives, field notes, documents, and impressionistic records in search of patterns that will order and scaffold the narrative" (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997, p.189). The data analysis ended when I felt there were enough themes to create a symbolic frame, a source of organization or stability, and a clear pattern to document enough of a story to paint a metaphoric portrait, as defined by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997). Five modes of synthesis, convergence and contrast are used by the portraitist to identify themes (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

According to Lawrence-Lightfoot,

First, we listen for repetitive refrains that are spoken (or appear) frequently and persistently forming a collective expression of commonly held views. Second, we listen for resonant metaphors; poetic and symbolic expressions that reveal the ways actors illuminate and experience their realities. Third, we listen for the themes expressed through cultural and

institutional rituals that seem to be important to organizational continuity and coherence. Fourth, we use triangulation to weave together the threads of data converging from a variety of sources. And finally, we construct themes and reveal patterns among perspectives that are often experienced as contrasting and dissonant by the actors. (p. 193)

The process of creating the portrait was intentional and incorporated four dimensions of story development: conception, structure, form, and cohesion (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). The first step in the process was to develop the concept of each woman's story by reflecting on the data she provided and the emergent themes from NVIVO coding and word searches, which assisted in developing the narrative. NVIVO provided the bulk of theme development and data for conception, character, and structure development. I thought deeply and broadly about how each woman described herself, how others perceived her, and how I envisioned her. Next, I thought about what the larger contexts of each woman's story represented and used this to clarify the conceptualized pieces of her story, while creating the sub-headings and weaving the content of her character in the narrative.

Thirdly, I thought of the emotions expressed by each woman and myself concerning her story, in this stage I quieted myself and began to form poetic renderings of each woman and myself to describe the experiences and emergent themes in the story. I thought about what stories and wisdom to include in each story while watching and listening to each of them again, looking for body language and gestures to determine what and how they expressed knowledge. Lastly, I had to determine the sequencing of the portrait, where to begin and end the story was critical to achieve cohesion. I thought about what would fully represent the woman, the data, and her journey best. After constructing each portrait, I engaged several different readers to serve as an audience to check for resonance and clarity of the portrait.

Reliability and Validity

Triangulation incorporates multiple sources, methods, and theories to shed light on a perspective or theme (Creswell, 2007); this research leveraged a plethora of methods to gain access to the Black women leaders lived experiences and business acumen. The portraitist used triangulation while looking for points of convergence among the organizational documents, creative works, impressionistic journal, and interviews. To increase validity of the portraits, member checking was used. Each participant was provided their individual portrait and asked to verify it for narrative accuracy and interpretive validity. Each of the participants confirmed that the portraitists had accurately depicted the information provided during the interviews, subsequent phone calls, and journal assignments. Two of the women shared that they cried when they read their portraits, because they felt the portraitist provided additional insight into who they were.

The participants were also given a copy of the group portraits and the emerging themes to check for theoretical and evaluative validity. All participants agreed that the data represented in this study depicts their stories and visioning's accurately. To further strengthen reliability and validity, the portraitist requested data from the original artist's seeking their inspiration for art pieces and data concerning their subjects. Four of five artists provided this information, which was useful for comparisons and provided insights. Only one of the artists did not respond to the portraitist's request, a link to her art work is provided, where referenced.

Managing and Recording Data

The researcher protected the data by limiting access to it on a personal laptop and cell phone that are both password protected in the portraitist's home. The private home office housed all documents, transcripts, and art pieces during the research and paper documents were

in a locked file cabinet drawer. These items will be retained for five years after the research has ended within this protected environment. All interview notes, consent forms, releases, journal writings, poetry submissions, and impressionistic journals (portraitist and participants) will remain in the portraitist's possession. All participants will be provided a copy of the final dissertation and any of their creative expressions upon request.

Assumptions

The portraitist assumed this research would be applicable to Black women leaders in public and private sector. This belief is based on the overarching biological similarity of gender and sociological similarities of race shared by every Black woman. Since much of the literature reviewed focused on private sector employees and those working in academia, it was assumed the research will be relevant to Black women working within the public sector. Another assumption was all Black women interviewed had faced some challenge based on the perception of her being identified as Black in the federal workforce. Finally, the researcher anticipated that Black women were aware of federal diversity initiatives and equal opportunity laws that prohibit discrimination based on race.

Limitations

This study resulted in certain limitations based on various factors set by the research design. First, the study only assessed Black women in federal leadership positions and did not address other women or minority groups in the federal or private sector. The study was restricted to senior leaders in one federal agency. While the federal government is reflective of the diverse American population, it currently has several underrepresented populations that have yet to attain parity in pay or achievement of senior level positions (Lewis, 1998, U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2012). The only employer for this study was one agency

within the federal government; each federal entity has a unique culture and infrastructure that may affect leaders differently. The next chapter contains the individual and group portraits of three Black women senior leaders in the federal government and original poetry written by the portraitist describing each woman.

CHAPTER IV

PORTRAITS

When I think about myself I almost laugh myself to death.

—Maya Angelou, *The Mask*, 1987

The participants in this study were three Black women leaders in the United States federal government. Two of them are married and only one of them has children. All the women have worked for twenty or more years in the federal government in the same agency and would be considered “baby boomers.” All the women are over 50 and are currently employed in a senior leadership position. Each of the women intends to retire from the agency they work for and two of them plan to retire within the next year.

The women were each equally excited to tell their stories and shared openly with the portraitist concerning their experiences. When discussing their chosen careers and current motivation all the women cited the opportunity to help others as a trademark of her leadership. Each of these women displayed strength, resilience, and commitment to her organization and the people they lead. They each exhibited an uncanny passion for their agency and the people they serve, despite the adversity faced, real or perceived.

Setting

A primary goal of this portraiture study was to create a finished product that the reader will experience and “feel as if he or she is there.... transported into the setting” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 44-45). I reflected on my own personal leadership journey as a Black woman working in the federal government as a senior leader. I reflected on my resilience, perceived barriers, obstacles faced, and strategies used to overcome them. What did I want to pass on to the next generation of Black women in leadership? What would my portrait look like?

As I reflected on each woman's story in my impressionistic journal, I realized how much of their stories were being filtered through my personal lens. I shared the same organizational role as each of the women and I was honest with each woman upfront that while we have a shared experience, this research will be detailed using their authentic voice. In the opening comments of every interview, I purposefully stated, "this research intends to capture and report your individual and collective experience as a Black woman who leads in the Federal government."

My perspective is part of the context and I made my presence "explicit, not masked or silenced... (so that) the reader can better interpret the product and process of (my) vision." (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 50). Self-reflections from my impressionistic journal are included in the portrait to allow readers to make their own interpretations. It is not possible for the portraitist to deny her voice and experiences when they clearly resonate with the lived experience explored in a portrait. Many of my field notes and impressions were in the form of poetry. The rhythm of each woman's experience lent itself to this modality of cultural expression. At the end of each portrait is an original poem written by me, the portraitist that is inspired by each participant. These poems seek to tell their story in a different way. I was inspired by each woman differently and telling her story in this manner added another dimension to each portrait.

Individual Miniature Portraits

Ruth – The Confident Black Woman Who Leads with a Mothering Trait

Resilience was instilled in me in my childhood.

—Ruth, 2017

Ruth grew up in a family where her race and gender was never seen as an obstacle to achieving a goal. Girls and boys alike were taught to accomplish tasks and to persevere. Her earliest childhood memories and lessons were steeped in resilience theory. Ruth recalls being told, “If you fall down, you don’t just lay there, because they will trample over top of you and you don’t want to be trampled on.” Drawing on this childhood advice, Ruth continues to advise others to, “tuck and roll, and get out of the way.” This life lesson was a thread that ran through the narrative of her story. Ruth’s advice if heeded suggests that you need to move quickly from stage one of the resilience cycle known as the deteriorating phase to phase two, which is known as the adapting cycle.

Ruth is a 57-year old Black woman who is married with no children. She was born in the South and raised by her mother and father. Ruth described stories about the strong, six feet tall Native American women ancestors on her mother’s side of the family and the strong people on her father’s side of the family who held slave ancestry. “Race didn’t have anything to do with it, they just reminded us, they were strong,” Ruth said when asked, “Were you told as a child that you need to be strong because you’re Black?” There were no racial restrictions placed on Ruth until she began working for the federal government. Her elementary school was all Black until integration in the 4th grade. “We knew they were White, being Black and having to deal with Whites, was no big deal.” Gender restrictions were described by Ruth during her first interview. She noted girls and boys played together until little girls started developing their shapes. This

didn't limit her necessarily; it shifted her lessons and tutelage by limiting her interactions with boys.

Humble Beginnings

"The road in front of our house was and still is a dirt road. We had large trees to swing from, as we soared to the sky, we talked of our dreams and listened to the stories of our grandparents, aunts, and uncles." Ruth recalled scenes of her childhood as though she was watching a movie. She was an observant child taking in knowledge from everything around her, because she knew she would need it one day to pass it on to someone else.

Ruth credits the women at church with her initial leadership quest. They applauded her past success, to include being the third Black person hired in her office; however, they continued to advise her she could do more. It was 1983, and Ruth was beginning her federal career in the typing pool. Ruth began to cry as she recounted the love poured upon her by the women in her life as she tried to discover her path. She became emotional recounting the words given to her by the leaders at church who told her, "You can do whatever you want to do, you can excel."

She seemed to travel back in time as she repeated the words of these women speaking in a manner to convince herself, "OK, shoot, you can do this" in response to the women at church's assertions of her potential leadership capabilities. Those words seemed to propel her forward and she moved from the position of typist to lead typist to typing supervisor with their words in the back of her mind, guiding her feet. The women at church saw something in Ruth she had yet to discover; others quickly saw the same thing in her and her subordinates were the next voices that moved her higher. Ruth became emotional, and as the tears rolled down her round face, I thought of what a tender moment this was and what a wonderful tribute to those women who planted a seed over 30 years ago that bloomed into the generous woman seated in front of me.

Armed with a new sense of confidence, she went to work and asked the top supervisor how she could achieve his position. His response to her was hard work, dedication, read a lot, listen to people, and pay attention to what they do and say. These words must have reverberated with her for years, because when I asked her a similar question six years ago this is close to what she described as what success in our position would look like. Ruth was the first Black woman leader I met when I began working in the agency we share. Her insight was invaluable to me throughout the six years I held a senior leadership position. She was direct, yet always willing to provide encouragement and guidance, often I called Ruth when I was in the deteriorating phase of the resilience cycle. When I needed a friendly voice or a word of advice, she was the one on the other end of the phone nurturing and telling me I was going to be all right. “Girl, you’re going to be all right, don’t let those folks run you crazy,” I recall her saying regularly.

Ruth’s mother hoped she would become a school teacher, but Ruth affirmatively declined. “No, I am not the one, I’m not the school teacher type, and I don’t do children that well.” At the time Ruth didn’t think she followed instructions well; however, over the years this has helped her succeed in the federal government. What I found interesting is during her interview, Ruth seemed to take on the role of a teacher in the way she communicated her answers. She kept eye contact with me and changed her posture to emphasize the advice she had been given in the past and ensured I was receiving it.

I understand how Ruth’s mother would have considered teaching an excellent occupation for her daughter. Ruth’s mannerisms and body language, suggests she is willing to impart knowledge and wisdom to whomever she encounters. She is patient and detailed in her explanations and seeks confirmation that you have received what she has shared. While Ruth

may not have been interested in teaching children, she has taught adults in the federal government directly and indirectly.

Ruth considers her role as a leader akin to that of a village leader, “I felt I had to check the world out first and then come back and encourage them that they could go out into it.” She motioned with her hands, “come on yawl, come on.” This thought and the fact that the higher graded positions were located at Headquarters led her to relocate to Washington, D.C. This would allow some of her employees to compete for her former position. Ruth knew her employees would not apply for other positions because they did not want to lose her as a supervisor.

While working in Washington, D.C., she befriended a network of Black leaders and began incorporating their suggestions to build her career. Ruth’s eyes were swelling with tears once again as she spoke of the first time she saw Black people in authority in her organization. There was a sense of awe and wonder in her voice even today as she remembers thinking, “Wow, there are a lot of Blacks here, to see them in authority, that’s where I saw them.” When Ruth saw other Black people in leadership, it helped her envision herself in a higher position of authority. This positively impacted Ruth and solidified her aspirations and helped her feel better about being away from her nuclear family at a young age. The new position Ruth accepted was over three hours away from her parents.

She became known as the “go to” for several projects. At work, people began to say, “If you need something, come see Ruth.” Ruth asked one of her mentors why this was happening and she was told, “People keep coming to you because you’re knowledgeable, you conduct yourself professionally and you know what you’re doing and you don’t pull the wool over anybody’s eyes, that’s why people keep coming to you.”

These words bolstered her confidence early in her career, coupled with the support of the family back home. Encouragement to reach for higher level positions became ingrained in Ruth's daily existence. It laid the foundation for her ambitions of reaching the top levels of the government pay scale before she retired. Ruth accomplished her goal, as she is currently the highest ranking administrative manager in her office. She plans to retire within a year.

I'll Get Back Up

"I remember as a child, when you fell down it was like get up, dust yourself off, if you fall down, get back up." Ruth portrayed an innate resilience in which she was unnerved at the notion of adversity, because she knew she would recover. Ruth is convincing when she talks about resilience and encountering workplace disappointments and obstacles. "I'll find something to pull up on," bouncing back was not a concern, it is the norm. Ruth was taught through modeling of her beloved elders and credits them with providing live examples for her to follow. As I spoke to Ruth, I could envision her moving quickly through the resilience cycle with ease, Ruth was motivated to teach others what she learned from adversity and trials.

As a child, Ruth was amazed by her grandmother who wore white as she cooked and never soiled her garments. "Grandma was a good cook, Grandma wore white, Grandma did not get food on her white clothes, and for the life of me how she did not get any food stains on her white uniform...but it was because Grandma payed attention to what she had to do and she was neat." This observation she made as a child inspired Ruth to be neat and taught her attention to detail. She felt safe, knowing her elders were watching her. She was taught at an early age that it was expected to fall and expected to get back up, such as riding a bike. This literal lesson has translated with her figuratively in the way she lives her life. She proudly proclaimed, "It's in me to get back up." "We don't have no dummies in our family," was her family's inspirational

mantra that inspired her to achieve academically. When detailing her childhood, she seemed to take everything at face value. If she was told she could do something, she believed it. “I will use whatever resources I have or I can find to get back up, it’s in me to pull up, it’s not in me to stay pressed down.”

This has not changed; this belief fuels her leadership fire. She does not consider the voices of the naysayer or the negative reviews she has received annually in the form of a leadership assessment. Ruth’s agency conducts what is known as a “climate survey” as an annual platform that employees can anonymously rate their superiors. Ruth’s assessment paints a less than favorable picture of her leadership, despite the successes of her team. She is undeterred and remains confident in her ability and she keeps moving forward.

As Ruth talked about her childhood lessons, I thought of how I came to be the woman I am today and the childhood encouragement that still motivates me in this moment. I thought about where my resilience story began and realized it was like Ruth’s in that my elders set a standard that I continue to follow. I am strong, because I came from a long line of strong women and I believe I am yet another link in the chain. I believe my children will be strong also, because that is what I am modeling for them. I thought of how Ruth never doubted she possessed the capacity to get back up and how she seemed after every encounter with adversity and it solidified her resilience to me.

You Don’t Sound like You’re Black

Ruth’s experience in the federal government is one marked with her attempting to maintain a delicate balance between her experiences and the impact her race and gender have on those experiences. When asked about the impact of her race and gender on her ability to lead, Ruth took a pause and her body language portrayed one attempting to scroll back through a

rolodex to answer an important question. Race was at the forefront of every detail shared by Ruth, but she was careful in her depiction of its impact. She settled on a thoughtful answer of, “to a certain extent, not a lot, because and the reason I’m saying not a lot, but at the same time a lot.” She went on to describe how this was attributed to the fact that she did not sound black on the phone.

Ruth did not use slang or black terminology in her professional duties and this seemed to confuse people when they saw her face-to-face. “I didn’t know she was Black, she doesn’t sound Black on the phone,” was a common remark made concerning Ruth. While listening, I was reminded of the countless times this happened to me in my career and the shock on people’s faces when they finally met me. Ruth shrugged this off and handled it with humor in that she would respond, “funny, they didn’t sound like they were White, either.”

Ruth shared a story of her attending a conference in which she finally met a woman in which she had befriended earlier. She conducted some work for the woman and the woman had sent her a potholder as a thank you gift. They spoke often and during the conference when Ruth stood up to introduce herself, the woman started choking. She was seated one row behind Ruth and she knew who she was by her name tag. Ruth asked the woman if she was all right and politely sat back down as other people snickered in the room.

During the break, a woman approached Ruth and inquired if she knew the true reason the woman choked, Ruth responded “yes, because she didn’t know I was Black.” The woman responded, “a lot of us didn’t know you were Black, you don’t conduct yourself like you are Black.” This all went back to the way she sounded on the phone and the professionalism she displayed while carrying out her duties. Ruth thought this was crazy, but described it as being the mentality back then. She confirmed race had impacted the way she has been accepted as a leader.

Ruth believes as a Black woman she still runs up against “the good ole boy network.” Her gender is felt to be a barrier as it relates to the way the male leaders interact with her. She feels, men want to make sure the men still rule and fail to recognize that women are their counterparts who are empowered to delegate work. She feels they want women to stay in stereotypical gender roles which require them to make coffee and clean up behind the men.

Ruth has not only seen firsthand the challenges faced by Black women leaders, she has comforted other women facing them. The mothering trait she possesses provides a forum for her to dole out encouragement that is needed by many. “Black women don’t want to fight anymore and you still have to fight,” she said with conviction. Ruth has a fire burning inside of her that has sustained her on dark, cold days. She still carries the words of other Black leaders with her and describes them as nuggets of wisdom.

As Ruth shared some of her nuggets, I identified several nuggets shared with me during my career. They may be pieces cut from the same cloth, passed on from woman to woman or throughout generations. One such piece of advice Ruth easily recalled receiving early in her career was from one of the few Black women in leadership. This woman told Ruth, “there are not that many of us (meaning Black women) in authority and they don’t like us being there, so if you ever get in authority remember who you are and whose you are.” This is a frequent saying in the Black church referencing God’s role in our lives.

Ruth remembers before the woman left her desk, she told her she could do more than be a secretary and encouraged her to seek another position. Ruth told her she was using this position as a stepping stone and the woman with her final words told her to use every stone she could find. This invigorated Ruth because people were always giving her advice and she says she considered herself like a little squirrel, hoarding all the nuts she was given. Ruth may consider

herself a squirrel, but she is certainly not a hoarder of wisdom because she gives it away freely. If anything, she has opened a shop in which other squirrels are free to browse the laden-rich shelves, regardless of their ability to pay.

“What Can I Do to Make a Change?”

Curiosity has been a trademark in Ruth’s career and led her to significant career discoveries. Her willingness to ask questions of those around her and above her gave her insights that helped her with promotions in the federal government. She was a trusted entity in the workplace and was often sent to training in the place of managers in much higher grades than herself. This made her curious concerning how she was going to reach her goal of retiring at a top General Service (GS)-level. Ruth realized she would have to change positions to achieve this goal. This led her to numerous changes that included promotions and lateral job changes to improve upon her skill set. She used change to inspire herself and others in her circle of influence.

Ruth used a metaphor of the Pink Panther character to describe how she felt in the early years of her career.

“I’ve got this long tail that everybody keeps dumping on, I’ve got these little ears, which means I’m listening to everything and I feel that my ears need to expand, but they don’t and sometimes you just have to keep your mouth shut when you see things you don’t agree with.

I could picture myself as she described how she learned to keep her mouth shut until asked to speak in meetings due to feeling as though no one wanted to hear your opinion. Ruth noted the impact of being the only Black person in the meeting as an intimidating experience in which she did not feel equal. In time, she began to share her opinion and expertise with more than her employees and peers. “What can I do to make a change, stand strong and yet, keep peace, that’s

hard.” Ruth attempted to change perspectives throughout her career with her peers and her leaders. This is one way she overcomes obstacles by working hard to have others see things from her perspective.

Ruth vividly recalled the opposition she faced when securing her second leadership position. She described the confusion on her prospective supervisor’s face when she was told that she was there for an interview and not a meeting. “General Services Administration (GSA) had a lot of Black people working for them and she thought I was from GSA until she was told I was there for an interview and her whole countenance changed.” Before sitting in the interview chair, it was clear to Ruth that her presence had upset this woman. Her suspicions were confirmed during the interview as the supervisor appeared angry, sitting with her hands clasped and never taking a note. After being hired, Ruth was told that this woman had publicly declared, “I won’t ever have a Black supervisor working on my team.”

Little did she know that Ruth would prove her wrong, when she was hired for the position becoming the first Black administrative supervisor in that office. Ruth was surprised at the job offer and found solace in the words of her mother and a gospel song entitled, “I Believe,” by Sounds of Blackness (1993). This job required her to move nine hours away from her family with no support system, but it opened the doors to reaching her goal of holding the highest ranking administrative position in her Division. Unsure of accepting the position, Ruth drew upon her faith and prayed seeking an answer from a higher authority. She believed the gospel song was her confirmation and she accepted the position, packed her bags and headed west. Ruth uses faith as her guide as she moves through the resilience cycle. She has past experiences to motivate her and this cements her resilience.

When asked about how she overcame those fears, she explained that she felt like she could do it and she did. She felt like quitting on occasion, but continued to work hard despite her supervisor's agenda to get rid of her. Ruth found a confidant in a Black male leader in the office, who ultimately selected her for the position based on her reputation and her work ethic. He was honest with her detailing her selection and what transpired the days following the interview. "Your reputation is stellar, there are a lot of people who respect you in this office because of how you conducted yourself and the things you said to them when you were here." This leader confirmed what she had been told her whole life, "your work will speak for itself." Her work ultimately won the trust of her supervisor and upon her retirement she trained Ruth to perform the functions of her job, because she knew how much Ruth cared about the people and the office. Ruth, despite the initial oppression faced by this supervisor coordinated a retirement party for this woman because in her words "...you always give a good sendoff" I can hear her laughter and see the expressions she displayed as she told the story.

No, That Nigger Didn't Ask Me Those Questions?

Ruth is an extremely outspoken woman, who learns by asking questions. She understands she has a reputation in the organization for speaking frankly. At an interview, she asked a series of insightful questions that the prospective supervisor was not prepared to answer. She asked about their diversity policy and the demographics of the office she would be leading. The look on the lady's face said it all to Ruth as she interpreted a racial slur was going through her mind. "You can picture what they're saying, because back then they could call you a nigger and you would just be like no they didn't just call me that...bless you."

I recall when I was new to the organization sitting with her at a conference. When she saw me join the table she said with a smile, "you may not want to sit at this table with me,

“you’re too young in your career and we’re going to cause trouble at this table; you may not want to be seen sitting with me.” I took her advice and sat at another table. As the conference progressed, I understood her warning because she and the group of seasoned leaders did not back down from the challenging topics as presented. Ruth is keenly aware of the stigma that can be placed upon Black people congregating in one area in the work place. Her experiences have led her to try to shield others from potential adversity, whenever possible. Ruth described the perceptions she faced concerning the reaction White employees have when she and other Black people talking to each other or going to lunch with her.

Ruth is matter of fact and unbothered by the assertion that she is somehow doing anything other than satisfying her physical hunger. “Sometimes, and it’s not all the time, but I cannot be standing in the halls talking to two other Black people, because then they say it’s a coup.” Ruth’s experience is that Black people standing together garners extra attention. With her southern drawl and infectious smile, she says, “lunch is lunch.” When I heard, her say this it was like someone applying salve to a deep wound. That is the number one criticism I faced as a Black leader. Year after year, I was accused of favoritism as it pertained to Black employees. Employees paid extra attention when they saw a Black employee in my office, promoted or talking to me in the hall. In my impressionistic journal, I wrote, “so, I’m not paranoid after all.... someone else knows what I’m talking about.”

Ruth is aware of the attention that her Black skin attracts, she learned this early in her federal government experience. She has learned to ignore some of the inappropriate stereotypes and unfounded assertions that she is not allowed to eat lunch with whom she chooses. She says flippantly and humorously, “I continue to go to lunch, because I’m hungry, I’m not worried about you.” Understanding that Ruth has endured being called racial slurs in the same agency she

works for today, gives a depth to her resilience and gives credence to her assertion that she does not care what people think about her.

How I Got Over

Ruth described adversity as a natural occurrence in her career as easily as she described joy in her career. She has weathered many storms, but walks with an ease and a calmness about her as she shares how others can persevere. Her advice for other Black women was simply stated, “go beyond me.” Ruth feels she annually faces adversity in the form of a climate survey that is inaccurate in the way she is perceived, according to her. Year after year, she continues to give direction, guidance, and wisdom to the people who vilify her in this report. When asked about coping mechanisms concerning this measurement, she remarks “I don’t even read it, I put it in the desk drawer.” She also noted that she doesn’t care what other people think of her. Ruth verifies that her boss is happy with her performance and that is satisfaction enough to determine what adjustments she needs to make.

In her office she uses aromatherapy, breathing and calming oils to ease stress at work. Exercise has become an effective coping method for her. Ultimately, she has learned to leave work at work and separate work life from her home life. “Work will kill you, the job will kill you and there’s no point of dying in that chair.” Ruth draws strength from the Bible, songs she hears and her friends, family and her peer supervisors. Biblical scriptures such as Psalm 23 and women in the Bible are sources of her inspiration. Listening to the description of the Shero selected by Ruth gave an optic into the woman she aspires to be and the woman she has become. The Biblical Ruth character was described as a wise woman who gave reverence to her family and her God. The participant Ruth admired Biblical Ruth’s humility and the fact that she was a leader and a follower who knew how to handle the attention she received appropriately.

Ruth was overcome with emotion and began to cry as she compared herself to her Biblical shero, “it’s hard to talk about yourself as it relates to others, it’s easier to sit and listen to someone talk and try to get it right.” This emotion stemmed from some of Ruth’s past experiences and the culmination of how far she has come throughout the years without ever stopping to reflect upon her journey. Ruth thanked me for the opportunity later that evening through a text message that read, “thank you for making me talk about myself today.”

Resilience as defined by Ruth is a daily process that can be conquered. She masterfully describes how one can become resilient. “If you say your prayers, going and coming, God will give you an answer for whatever it is you need for that day or that situation, because whenever some situations come up it’s not just for that individual it’s for the collective group.” She’s not sure how others would define her resilience. Cheerfully, she reiterated numerous times during her interview that she does not concern herself with other people’s opinions.

I Am the Woman in Red

Ruth is a woman who knows exactly who she is. Ruth is comfortable telling her story and is surprised to hear her own descriptors coming out of her mouth. Of the three women interviewed, Ruth and I laughed the most, due to her humorous outlook on life. She is an animated woman and is often seen laughing and making an array of non-verbal gestures. She and I both wear what we are saying on our faces and can have a conversation without saying a word. Having a pre-existing relationship with Ruth helped the portraitist in establishing trust, yet during the research I saw a side of Ruth not previously seen. It dawned on me how much of ourselves is hidden in plain sight to our co-workers and peers.

Ruth struggled with the journal assignment seeking a self-image. However, when I set up the art piece “*Sunday Conversations*,” (figure 2) she remarked, “I think I am the women in red.” Ruth was methodical in her description of the woman and how it described her. She could see

some of herself in the other women, but overwhelming felt a connection with the woman in red. She also saw her strength in the lady in yellow's leg and connected that trait to herself. She thought the arms of the lady in red told a story, she added that the woman shows that she bears stuff on her chest, but not so much that it causes her to choke. This gives insight into Ruth's experience as a Black women leader, because she has experienced and tasted discriminatory comments, negative stereotypes, and bias in her career, yet she managed to reach her goals; Ruth never choked.

The lady in red wore slide on shoes and carries a clutch bag. Ruth saw the shoes as comfortable and fast and felt that too described an aspect of her. The woman in red also has the Bible in her hand prepared to share with the other women, which correlates with Ruth's collaborative leadership style. When describing the portrait, the collaborative nature of the group of women is at the forefront of Ruth's descriptors. "They are sophisticated Black women who each has a strength that they are willing to share with each other." She related strongly with this. "I am always taking care of someone," Ruth said of the image of how other's see her. She envisioned herself as a grandmother with little children around her seeking something. In the workforce, her experience has been that people are coming to her because she is someone who has the information and can help them.

While embracing the traits of the woman in red and the grandmother, Ruth expresses the adversity she is currently facing and how it has evolved throughout the years. The adversity she currently faces stems from generational diversity issues. "Adversity I'm dealing with now is younger and sharper, a lot of the employees I'm dealing with are younger than me." Generational diversity is noted as an obstacle currently plaguing Ruth. This was an interesting parallel to the stories she expounded upon from her younger days in the federal government and the

perspectives of the older leaders she once encountered. The current adversity Ruth faces is short lived and evokes little emotion if any, she has successfully weathered many storms in her federal career and has overcome them all.

Ruth found the words from Maya Angelou's poem, "Still I Rise", spoke to her experience. Several of the verses rang true for her: "Shoulders falling like teardrops, weakened by my soulful cries? Diggin in my own backyard. But, still like air I'll rise" (Angelou, 1978). This poem has always motivated her. Ruth was the only woman to provide additional poetry that she liked, but chose "Still I Rise" as the piece that best described her experience. Ruth has a clear vision of what she wants for the future. "I'm still trying to reach my goal of retirement and before I reach retirement, I'll start another goal." The goal she intends to set is purely to help others see the importance of enjoying life after retirement. "It's not all about work, it's about helping others," according to Ruth.

A Portrait of Resilience and Prose for Ruth

The portrait entitled *Sisters in Spirit* by Monica Stewart (n.d) can be seen at <http://www.monicastewart.com>. It is the embodiment of Ruth from the portraitist's lens. She does not see herself individually, but as a larger part of a collective of her organization. She is not seeking to stand out or seek glory for herself, her entire career has been one dedicated to blazing a trail in which many are encouraged to follow. I admired her humility and watched her closely as she joyfully told stories of those she helped and those who helped her. Ruth genuinely sees herself as a part of a village where her contributions are vital to its survival and she joyfully gives of herself to ensure the villagers have what they need to succeed.

I see Ruth in the “Sisters in Spirit” print with her head tilted to the side, because she identifies with other Black women leaders and aspiring leaders. She has blended in the background of the portrait with grace and style and is determined to understand the experience of her sisters to assist them. She does not mind that her face is not prominent, it is not important to her portrait, what's important is that she is a part of something bigger than herself. She has endured setbacks in the federal government, in which she has had to close her eyes and draw strength from other women, when she was in phases one through three of the resilience cycle, but she has never given up even though she felt like it. The crossed arms of the Black women symbolize strength and the attempt to shield themselves from pain.

This is often difficult in the Black woman's experience as evidenced by numerous historical commentaries and studies of Black women shown through the slave experience in America. The picture reminds me of Ruth's early childhood stories and her reliance upon her family. She described a close-knit community, one in which girls were taught valuable skills needed to make it as an adult. Ruth's portrait must capture more than herself, because she draws

inspiration from the Black women who molded her and from the countless people she continues to mold.

Monica Stewart's art work captures a longing that Black women express to be accepted in their settings; beneath Ruth's tough exterior, I sensed this longing as well. While Ruth no longer expresses that need, it did not go away. She has learned to deal with rejection and hostility by embracing her own "sisters in spirit." Her bare arms drawn in the portrait are a measure of showing strength and the willingness to be vulnerable, which requires remarkable strength. I see Ruth strong in this portrait, yet vulnerable due to her need to nurture. This need compels her to open her heart, even though she risks it being broken, but she is prepared for this and knows that if it does happen she has a village willing to comfort her. She has no fear of not being able to overcome whatever life throws at her, Ruth has learned to bloom wherever she's planted.

Ethnographic Poem

A little bit of honey, a drop of tart too

Sweet and salty with ripe honey dew melon

Dripping from your fingers

Tough as nails

Sharp tonged with an impeccable eagle eye,

“Listen to me, child,” she wails

You are the woman in red

Poised and positioned for the day

Perfectly prepared through years of expertise

No wear and tear or fray

Around your edges, you are strong

Navigating the leadership waters

Further along than most your peers

Your rivals held at bay

“Sweet mama,” they call you to your face

Hateful names annually in a whisper

They glance, but you look to the sky

“Come on yawl, we can do this”

Is tattooed on your outer thigh

So, there’s no mistake where you are headed

Or where you’ve been

Your infectious laugh and your signature mark grin

Make you locatable Approachable

Tenable and finally

Huggable

Emotions welling up in your eyes

Overflowing from your heart

Held deep inside

From a nurturer’s, deep well

We draw upon you and find it

I found buckets of Knowledge,

Wisdom, Love, and a Life Raft

with the pull cord, still in place

You chose to stay in the murky waters

Attempting to make them crystal clear for me

Never giving up, but giving back

I salute you in your very own

regal individual portrait

Framed in your resilience as....

My mentor, my teacher and my friend

Jenny – The Objective Woman Who Leads with Compassion

If you're on a path that's not going where you need it to go, why would you stay on it?

-Jenny, 2016

Jenny and I met at a library on a cold morning. Despite the cold winter morning, the sun shone on us while we fumbled to take the perfect selfie with the library as our backdrop.

The library where Jenny and I met was across the street from a stately yellow house reminiscent of a southern plantation - a place that sought our attention upon our arrival and departure. We both commented on its beauty while the significance and potential impact of this research raced through my mind.

Two distinctive pillars on the front of the house framed the picturesque windows. I thought of the Black women who had possibly come and gone from that house throughout the years. I wondered if any of their stories had been captured, or if any of their struggles were chronicled. This place inspired me to capture Jenny's experiences appropriately and accurately. We were two Black women leaders from the South sharing stories of tears and triumph through service in the federal government. We both glanced at the road and thought how silly we must have looked retaking the photo just to get the perfect selfie. Then we laughed and laughed again as we took photos on the steps and off the steps with the sun following us. We were like two school girls, frolicking in the early morning light.

Jenny and I knew we were in the Deep South when we arrived at the small library in South Carolina because as I walked inside, an elderly Caucasian woman, urged me to sit with her. She said, "You better be careful while you're here." My mind instantly filtered her warning with my race as a priority; however, she was referring to my gender. She went on to explain how dangerous it was for women to be traveling alone and shared a story of a young woman who was

recently kidnapped and beaten. I found this stranger's concern for me a wonderful start to a cold winter morning after driving for four hours to meet Jenny. Her willingness to greet a stranger so kindly, reminded me of my maternal grandmother and that always makes me smile. When Jenny arrived, the woman invited her to sit with us. She asked her husband to provide us the name of a good local restaurant. We thanked them for their hospitality and headed to the back of the library to find an open table to set up.

I became greatly distracted during parts of Jenny's interview. The library had only one private room that was reserved for groups of five or more individuals. Although the room was vacant, the staff would not let me use the space to interview Jenny, so this forced us to conduct her interview without the privacy I wanted. Close to us in proximity were two Black adolescents that caught my attention, and I found it challenging not to think what would become of them. As Jenny began to answer the questions, I wondered what would the little dark skinned Black girl not fifteen feet from me might face in the workplace if she chooses to become a leader? Who will mentor her? How will she handle adversity? How will what I am doing this morning positively impact her life? What would become of the gentle, sweet Black boy who gave up his seat near the outlet so we could plug in the video camera?

As a portraitist, the youth became infused into the landscape of Jenny's portrait. I could ignore their presence or I could infuse them into the setting. I believe their existence is noteworthy and their presence helped me to renew my focus on the importance of telling these women's stories. Jenny took notice of them also and as we began our interview questions they faded into the scenery along with the other patrons that sat at tables near us. They would glance over at us and wonder what we were doing and we would do the same.

The Chosen Path

Jenny is a woman in her 50's; she is not married and does not have any children. However, she is actively mothering her two dogs and speaks of them affectionately. Her eyes light up as she details her team and the work she is most proud of accomplishing with them. The path Jenny chose led her to a variety of positions that have culminated in her achieving the highest-ranking position on the civil service pay scale. Her federal career has been one in which she tried new things and found success. Jenny welcomed change and seemed to thrive on it. She has worked with the same federal agency for more than 20 years and has no plans of leaving, yet she has had eight different positions within her agency. She feels that there is always some place to go in the organization if you are not happy where you are.

The idea of coming to work every day and not enjoying it is not an option for Jenny. There were times that she felt that she needed to change jobs, but she never felt she needed to leave the organization. Once Jenny realized that she needed a change, she confidently stepped out and reached for it. She found that despite the organizational culture and challenges, there was always a fair place within the agency if you were willing to move.

As she spoke about this, I was in the process of leaving the agency for which I worked and reflected upon how differently I felt. It was an interesting comparison to hear how her resilience called her to stay and mine required me to leave. Both of us experienced the roller coaster of the resilience cycle, getting stuck at various stages in our efforts to reach the recovering stage. It dawned on me that I didn't reach the growing stage until the last year of my employment in the agency. Jenny is currently in the recovering stage from her latest setbacks in the agency. Our experiences were similar in the treatment we received from the employees and their perceptions concerning our leadership, but our internal responses were different. This could

be attributed to the fact that I have not invested nearly the amount of years that Jenny has in the organization. It could also be attributed to my unwillingness to work in Washington, D.C., which is where Jenny credits as a foundational space that contributed to her success.

Jenny's inner strength is objectivity and provides her the perspective she needs to look past the criticism she receives. She is introspective and I could tell that she has put much thought into her leadership journey prior to meeting with me. She is excited about the prospect of telling her story and it is evident as we progress through the morning. Her perspective is refreshingly thoughtful for nearly every response to the questions I posed during our interview. I got the impression that she uses her heart when trying to understand her experiences as well as others. Jenny sees the best in others and exudes compassion when dealing with her employees. This has resulted in Jenny's survival and lends credence to her ability to thrive in her federal agency.

Jenny was inspired by a female unit chief to apply for a leadership position. She had not considered being in leadership, until someone else encouraged her. She has since encouraged others to pursue leadership as well. When Jenny left a former position, she suggested that one of the employees consider her position. The woman was surprised, because, like Jenny she had never considered leadership as a possible path for herself. According to Jenny, this woman was intelligent and possessed leadership capabilities. Jenny decided to bluntly confront the woman with the truth and encourage her that she could do the supervisory job that she was vacating.

"I was in the same boat, I was thinking the same," Jenny remarked as she recounted her state prior to accepting a leadership position. Prior to her being encouraged by a former mentor, Jenny had no leadership aspirations. She has found this is true of several of the women she has encountered in the federal workforce also. Jenny hopes that other Black women will start looking in areas that they have not considered. She became the first Black woman to hold her position in

one of the offices she worked. I was the first Black woman to hold the position in my office as well.

Jenny knows that giving up and making excuses does not make for success in the work place. Jenny, reflected about to an employee who complained about not getting a position, she reminded the person, “Forget about what ever happened in the past, Jenny recalled telling a former employee disappointed by non-selection for a position.” Jenny urges other women to concentrate on what’s going on now, and not to let their past experiences serve as a reason that they do not move forward. Jenny had to apply for one position three times before she was selected and states emphatically, “just keep after it.”

Her can-do spirit is evident from listening to her. She has taken risks in her career and accepted positions that would challenge her capabilities. Jenny’s pioneering spirit has carved a path for her that others may follow. However, her path was not one with straight lines easily followed along a defined career trajectory. Even though her path was chosen by her, with intentional and strategic choices that afforded her to try new things, build on extant knowledge and skills, and blaze a trail that was uniquely her own.

I’ve Been Lucky

“I know I’ve been in a golden spot, so I don’t know if I would have been somewhere different how I would have had to react.” Jenny like the other women in this study, including me, did not initially seek leadership instinctively. The common theme to the stories is that leadership potential caught the eye of another woman leader who decided to inspire others to see themselves as leaders. Jenny is quick to credit her mother and great-grandmother as the informal leaders that inspired her to seek success in the work place.

The Black women in Jenny's family were a source of pride for her. They did not have formal leadership roles, but were leaders in the family. She affectionately described these women who, "kept things going, kept things organized, kept people on the right track." This description closely mirrors what Jenny is required to do in her federal role. She is emulating what she grew up seeing in her family life. She believes she received patience, compassion, and empathy by watching these women's examples.

Her first leadership experience came at the suggestion of a pioneering Jewish woman, who was one of the few women leaders in the agency at the time, according to Jenny. An organizational shift in the agency opened the door for many women to acquire leadership roles during the 90's. She credits the time she entered the organization and this shift as reasons that she could move up. "I never felt like I got overlooked for something, if I applied for it, I usually got it."

Most of Jenny's career was spent in Washington, D.C. The cultural diversity Jenny experienced early in her career made her a well-rounded leader. Jenny worked in a program office with several bi-lingual people. This was her first federal position and it exposed her to different people, perspectives, and approaches. She believes she was fortunate to work with people from all over the world. Jenny saw the impact diversity had on mission accomplishment and team dynamics. This early experience gave her confidence to apply for a position years later in a culturally diverse setting.

Few in her profession have served as a senior manager in a non-stateside office. Her race and gender were not factors for acceptance in this position, but the fact that she was not from the area impacted her. Jenny found it took nearly a year before she and others deemed "outsiders" were accepted in that culture. The employees were hesitant to accept those who did not share

their heritage. I inquired as to how she overcame those obstacles to which she responded, “At the end of the day, you really just had to go back to the fact that you were in authority, you know, I mean and just exert your authority, not in a negative or forceful way.” Jenny is mature and understands that being liked is not a requirement for effective leadership. “In any position of leadership, there is what they say to your face and how they feel behind your back.” She accepted the responsibilities that she is assigned and is not deterred by the negativity faced in leading people.

Jenny has seen plenty of negativity in current and past positions, but she has grown stronger. She sees herself as resilient and is convinced that others see her that way as well. Jenny believes her personality type has helped her in leadership. She is thick skinned and takes little of what occurs in life personally, but admits it was not that way in the beginning of her supervisory career. This is a learned behavior that she wishes more supervisors adopted.

“I think the times when I struggled the most was when I was unsure of myself.” This insecurity happened in the first phase of the resilience cycle, the deteriorating phase. There is no benefit gained in this phase, but when Jenny progressed to the adapting phase her performance improved and her confidence increased. Making sure that you know what you are doing is a priority and the best advice Jenny has for leaders who need strength to lead other people. Jenny had a long pause as she thought of where her strength comes from; I sensed she had never really thought about that. I summarized her answer as from her expertise, authority and her ability. She believes she draws her strength from inside of herself.

Jenny has learned to use her strength to accept the backlash from being in a leadership position. When mentoring a former subordinate, she provided the following words of wisdom, “You don’t need them to like you, they don’t even need to like their job, they just have to do it.”

The new supervisor was physically ill at the thought of hearing all the negativity coming from her employees concerning her. She was not prepared for this and Jenny attempted to prepare her for what she considered a part of being a leader.

“I realize if I had been in a different location, my experience would have been different,” is one way that Jenny explained why she has not experienced the racial disparities noted by some Black women leaders. Working in diverse environments and locations are credited by Jenny as the reason she has not experienced discrimination in employment. When asked had she seen other Black women affected with negative experiences, Jenny could not provide any. She knew of law suits amongst certain populations within the agency and noted there are issues, but none that she has firsthand knowledge of. “The agency will be different in different places, it will be different in a small southern field office than it is, [*sic*] will be in Washington D.C. and most of my career has been in Washington, D.C.”

Listening to Jenny’s description of events, reminded me that many of the struggles we face are filtered through our past experiences. Jenny did not have any racially charged work experiences to compare her struggles to. She objectively looked at the situation at face value, sought feedback from her leadership and when on the rare occasion thought it could be race related, she explored it. In her exploration, she also considered possible alternate reasons for the disrespect she was receiving. She simply didn’t assume that anything she experienced was because she was Black. Jenny credits her mother with teaching her patience, empathy and not being quick to judge. “I think I got a lot of their character and personality traits that have been helpful, always giving people the benefit of the doubt, not being quick to rush to conclusions.” Echoing throughout her interview and her journal submissions were her earlier childhood

memories and lessons learned from her mother. Jenny is confident in herself, her abilities, her personal philosophy of leadership and her long held belief that she's been lucky.

Cyber Bullying in the Federal Government

Jenny was the most reserved of the leaders I interviewed. She was guarded and selective concerning sharing her climate survey, but not her experience. She was reluctant to provide the climate survey and stated, "I'm not embarrassed by it," but she needed clarification to analyze what its use was. I completely understood what she was conveying by her question. I certainly didn't want to share my results with anyone either. This was attributed to the distortion she perceived concerning her leadership. After speaking more in depth with her, I understood why. Her love for her employees has been greatly overshadowed by workplace changes and office politics. We shared a common bond surrounding the emotions evoked by our climate surveys. Both of us have been stung by the debasing comments and speculations concerning our abilities.

Anonymous complaints have allowed employees to spew venom without recourse and to write things, they would never say to their boss's face. Annually, Jenny's agency conducts a climate survey in which federal employees are asked a series of questions that provide executive management a snapshot of Jenny's leadership through the eyes of her subordinates. Each year, Jenny begins her roller coaster ride on the resilience cycle after reading the climate survey and has an opportunity to bounce back from the adversity she must face. The distortion of this image and Jenny's image of herself are as far as the east from the west. Jenny equated this annual experience to "cyber bullying." She said,

When you are not holding people accountable for the statements that are made
this is just the perfect platform for venting your hostilities and frustrations on the

people who are closest to you, just above you and I don't see where that creates anything useful.

This was a source of frustration for Jenny as she shared her survey is nearly all red, which equates to low scores. She was well prepared to take the criticism that comes along with supervision, but is greatly frustrated with the tool provided to employees to vent freely without context. Jenny is a problem solver and wants to have an effective, harmonious team. Jenny referenced the climate survey numerous times during her interview. While she is objective, this is a source of anger, frustration and deep hurt for her. Jenny has spent a great deal of time in the deteriorating phase, due to the climate survey, but it is only a test of her resilience. Jenny has maintained career resilience for over twenty years and continues to endure hostile work situations with class.

As one who has put a lot of thought into her leadership, she finds it difficult to be erroneously characterized and demonized annually in a public fashion. She feels some people view her as incompetent, because she is not a technical expert in the work that she supervises. The climate survey suggests that she is seen much differently than the way she sees herself. Early in the interview, Jenny said, "I feel like they all respect me, at least to my face anyway." This cause's great confusion for her when comparing the care and effort given to her team and the feedback she receives when reading the climate survey.

The climate survey as "cyber bullying" is described by every woman in this study in various ways. However, Jenny was the one who characterized it in a way that is easily understood by those unfamiliar with the instrument. She has learned to not allow the criticism to personally impact her. I pressed her on how she learned to do this. She replied, "Training and experience and you know just really self-preservation, you know you can't internalize all this

stuff and take it home with you every night, because it will make you crazy.” She has learned to compartmentalize what’s acceptable at work and home. She has clear established boundaries to depersonalize the accusations and inappropriate comments concerning her.

Jenny relayed the latest source of discontent in her unit. An underperforming employee resigned after being provided feedback and being placed on a performance improvement plan. Jenny’s employees blame her for this and feel that she forced the employee to leave the organization prematurely under the threat of removal. Jenny was holding the employee accountable, which coincidentally is one of the biggest complaints by employees. She is undeterred in performing her leadership responsibilities and shrugs her shoulders while saying, “Just keeping things in perspective, it is what it is.”

Drawing strength from herself, her experiences and internally is one of her coping mechanisms. This resilience energy is what leads Jenny to the growth phase, where she is able to separate the good that comes from her trials and gain strength from it. Jenny says, “Some of us are better leaders and some of us are better followers, I think you can certainly make some leaders, but I think I may have been one who was born.” She can easily separate work from personal and has had an employee applaud her because of this. Her goal is never to disrespect or take any of her employee’s self-worth from them. Her goal is to make them better.

Jenny feels some of the negativity she receives is due to one of her subordinate supervisor’s shortcomings. She has spent a great deal of time working with this employee, but sees some of the issues directly due to her strong personality and leadership deficiencies. She has spent time mentoring this employee, but has yielded few results in return. Jenny has not given up on this employee, but acknowledged that she does not expect her to change, especially now that the employee plans to retire within the next year.

Jenny has gone above and beyond to make her employees feel included. She purchased and engraved a gift for the two supervisors working for her to show her appreciation. But, while she was out, one of the supervisors mistakenly copied her on email traffic where she was undermining her authority and disrespectfully making comments about her. Jenny quickly expressed forgiveness of this employee's indiscretion, but stated she expected an apology when she returned to the office. This is not the first time she has forgiven this employee concerning negative statements publicly made about Jenny.

As Jenny described, she finds strength to continue to treat this employee and the others kindly. She still smiles as she describes the office shenanigans and complaints. Jenny was suspicious concerning whether her problems with this supervisor were due to her race, but another employee advised Jenny it wasn't. The employee told Jenny despite the person in the position, this woman didn't like them. Jenny and I acknowledged that it is often difficult to differentiate if racism is at play in work place rejections and criticism.

"It doesn't hurt me so much as it annoys me that no matter how often I demonstrate my admiration and respect for her and what she does. Whenever, she easily finds herself at odds with me over something insignificant and it seems that she's more comfortable there." Jenny is verbally expressive and I watched her face for cues to gauge her emotions throughout the interview. Whenever she referenced the climate survey, she would bristle, tilt her head to the side, curl her lips in a manner that caused a puzzled look to come over her face and sigh before saying what she thought of it. This look was reminiscent of someone who smelled a putrid odor or tasted something bitter. I saw this same look of confusion on every woman interviewed in this study, but it was most pronounced in Jenny.

While she sees this agency measurement tool as ineffective and a source of negativity that she likens to personal cyber bullying, she is not a victim. She may have been outspoken concerning her distaste, but she remained hopeful that she could remain in place and be an effective leader. Jenny has tenacity and a sheer will to stand face-to-face and toe to toe with any bully and confront him or her. She has no fear concerning the confrontation, because her weapon is compassion. She is not fighting fire with fire; she is fighting misperception, with the truth, her truth authentically.

Life Is Not All Pretty

Running through her leadership quilt was a patchwork of kindness and servant leadership. Jenny genuinely wanted to give her employees whatever they required for success. She has spent the last several years trying to improve the skills of people within her work unit. Many of them are failing due to an inability to acquire the necessary skills to complete complex analytical work. Jenny is empathetic, yet required to reduce an ever-growing document backlog.

At the core of Jenny is a woman who wants to help her team succeed. She is deeply devoted to her unit and its mission. However, she has been greatly misunderstood because she is unwilling to allow employees to languish in mediocracy. When asked to provide a visual of how others view her leadership Jenny provided a picture of the Queen of Hearts, with the caption “off with their heads” to describe how she believes some of the employees view her. She feels she is often looked upon as a villain concerning personnel matters.

She does not shy away from difficult conversations and this has led her to appear harsh and uncaring to some of her subordinates. This could not be further from the truth and this deeply disturbs Jenny, though she tries not to show it. As I interviewed her, I certainly felt the dissonance; there were smiles on her face but a hint of sadness in the room. Jenny described a

deep love for the people she is charged with supervising and understands the difficulties they face as they learn new skill. She sounded like a mother as she carefully expressed the reasons why her children were struggling to perform their work effectively and why she won't tolerate excuses.

Jenny leads a unit that has recently undergone an organizational change requiring employees to conduct in-depth analysis. Several of the employees are not capable of this work and when confronted with their limitations, they blame Jenny. Despite the fact that she has invested a significant amount of time into helping them acquire the necessary skills, they judge her leadership harshly. Jenny does not let this deter her; she continues to look for ways to help them improve. The adversity faced in this assignment has strengthened her resolve to make her unit high functioning. She falls back on her resilience and her abilities to navigate this change successfully; Jenny knows that she will survive, despite the crisis.

Jenny selected the Maya Angelou poem, "Still I rise" as the poem that resonated with her based on her life experiences. "You may shoot me with your words, you may cut me with your eyes, you may kill me with your hatefulness, but still, like air, I'll rise," are the words that describe how she feels about her leadership experience. "It is well known that anyone in a position of leadership opens himself up to increased scrutiny, criticism, judgment, and often unwarranted hate," said Jenny. The climate survey caused her to doubt her abilities and value to the organization, but she credits her upbringing and the leaders above her with helping her to see past it.

When asked about the impact her race has had on her. Her response was, "I don't feel like it's been a hindrance." She goes on to express uncertainty about the role it has played on her career and acceptance. She pauses and is careful with her words. "It may not, maybe I mean if it

was I didn't feel it so much, let me just put it that way." Jenny's parents raised her to believe that life is not fair and that you have to take the good with the bad. This wisdom has allowed her to rise above any obstacle she has faced in the federal government. Jenny continues to make the best of any situation she is handed.

Annoyingly Optimistic

Jenny spoke of her mother with a big smile on her face. She holds her mother in high esteem and feels she has gleaned leadership qualities from her. She feels she has taken on the trait she admires most in her mother, which is her compassion and willingness to help people. This was true of all the stories that Jenny shared with me. She beams with joy as she tells me that years ago she was called "annoyingly optimistic", now she wears it as a badge of honor.

Jenny's optimism is steeped in her objectivity. She is astute and discerning of her career success and how she reached the top of the federal pay scale. While she knows racism and gender disparities exist for Black women, she has not directly felt the impact of them in her advancement efforts. She wonders if the low numbers of Black women leaders are due to them not applying or not being accepted. As a hiring manager, generally her unit's recruits are representative of the applicants that apply.

She has only felt the effects of racial and gender issues from a few older employees who grew up in the south. While she has not directly felt the impact of racism or sexism, she does describe some of the same treatment that her peers attribute to disparate treatment. For example, Jenny relays a story concerning how her supervisor would not give her direct eye contact as she spoke, because he was watching the clock from the moment she began briefing. However, he hung on every word of her White male peer as he spoke.

Her peer was one of the lowest performers in the group, but he appeared to be favored by the supervisor. Jenny confronted her supervisor after noticing this pattern to bring awareness. Other employees noticed and complained amongst themselves, but Jenny spoke up. Her supervisor was embarrassed and attempted to change his behavior. She attributed his behavior to a lack of diverse experiences in his formative years.

This was not the only leadership challenge, Jenny faced under his leadership. Once, he rated her poorly and she challenged it with a two-page rebuttal. She left it on his desk with a leave slip for a week off. The supervisor responded with a new performance rating of “Outstanding”. This infuriated Jenny and as she is describing it she realized this was most likely to her race and his fear of her filing an EEO complaint. Acknowledging her shortcomings and reliving the conversation she said, “I never said I was perfect and I never asked you to change that rating to be absolutely perfect.” This change of rating was offensive to Jenny; she was sincerely seeking accurate feedback concerning her performance. Jenny decided to seek another position and that supervisor eventually resigned.

Holding people accountable has become a double-edged sword for Jenny. Jenny giggles and smiles with her whole face as she describes team outings and the office atmosphere. She looks at me seriously as she says with pride, “I can’t think of a single incident where somebody needed something that we could give them that we didn’t give them.” Buried beneath the negative encounters, harsh criticism and judgement faced by Jenny is optimism. This optimism fuels her and she freely shares it with anyone willing to listen to her story and views concerning leadership. Jenny uses her prior experiences and times of thriving to encourage others and help them face adversity.

In the Trenches

Jenny's leadership philosophy is "Yeah, I'm in charge, but I'm still in the trenches with you and working alongside of you." When her office relocated, she rolled up her sleeves and helped clean the office. While she acknowledges that she is in charge, she works alongside her people. She would never ask her staff to do something she is not willing to do. Performance issues have been the distinctive, prevailing issue plaguing Jenny's unit. They are coming to the end of them as many employees have resigned, transferred, or improved. "At the end of the day it's just a job." Jenny sees that many of her staff have their identities and self-worth tied to the job. She has worked hard to build relationships with people.

She realizes that the scrutiny she receives comes with the territory. Being the boss has placed a distance between her and the employees that is natural, yet distinctive. Jenny has implemented the practice of using "peer reviewers" as a strategy to cut down on the negative perceptions in the unit concerning performance. This allows for peers to actively determine which employees need improvement. They can dispel myths concerning performance in a way that Jenny cannot. As a leader, Jenny is not at liberty to discuss sensitive personnel information with employees. This often leads to rumors, speculations and inaccurate perceptions of work decisions. Jenny's compassion has led her to proactively attempt to find work for her employees who are not able to perform the duties of their position.

After discussions with her boss, she realized this would not benefit the agency and was driven by her inner need to help. Her employees will probably never know how much their leader cares about them and advocates for them. I thought of how I experienced this as well in my unit. Jenny and I laughed on several occasions during her interview. Jenny uses humor as a coping mechanism also.

Nearly every effort made by Jenny to express appreciation is rebuffed, yet she is not deterred. “I got to think of some tangible ways to show these people how much they are appreciated, since it is apparently being lost to them.” She realizes that much of what she hears from them are excuses and that her staff is burned out. Jenny expressed confusion concerning why employees continue to complain amidst all the attempts made to keep them engaged. “People are burned out; the work is repetitive and tedious.” Jenny continues to roll up her sleeves to find creative ways to engage her team. She reminds me of the children’s story, “the little engine that could.” She continues to listen, plan, and seek out solutions. She never gives up.

What Is It Going to Take to Make These People Happy?

Jenny has several questions that she is trying to find answers. I have titled this section with the question that is on Jenny’s mind as she leads her unit. I consider it her heart’s cry and a significant part of her leadership mission. I applaud her efforts to continually seek to better the people around her. After trying several things to improve her unit’s morale, complaints abound. She not only has employees with performance issues, but emotional issues. Jenny has held intimate, frank conversation with her employees in efforts to reach them and tries to provide appropriate life counsel to help improve their conditions.

Jenny was perplexed as she said, “Why are you looking for this place to fulfill you?” It was a rhetorical question that she never gets to share openly with her employees. It continues to baffle her nonetheless as she interacts with her staff. Jenny views work and home as two separate entities that support each other. She sees some of her employees do not have this view or balance in their life and are attempting to find their happiness in the workplace. Some have shared their loneliness to which Jenny has tried to fill the gap by assigning them special projects. However, she acknowledges that she does not have the ability to fix their brokenness.

Morale has been a problem, despite the numerous attempts to improve upon it by Jenny and her executive leaders. Many of the employees complain that the only thing leaders care about is the work and fail to see how generous leadership has been during their transition. Time off awards, jeans day, potlucks, door prizes, movie day, awards and verbal appreciation is lost on most of the employees. Jenny has conducted several team building days, but finds it is never enough.

Recently, Jenny personally baked cookies for her team and left them in the break room. Even this kind gesture was snubbed, when employees complained that she did not tell them the cookies were in appreciation of their great work. The patience that Jenny has exercised with her staff is commendable. The strength she conveys is remarkable as I see her bouncing back from adversity daily in her position. She enlisted the help of a professional recently to find out what it is going to take to make her people happy. She expressed this with frustration and concern simultaneously. “Why are we demonized for making them do their job that they get paid quite handsomely to do? I don’t understand that.”

Jenny’s vision is set to work quickly to keep the new people and non-complainers from being impacted. “People are spoiled,” is one likely reason Jenny provides for the morale issues. Prior to the assumption of new duties employees were able to come and go as they pleased, they were as Jenny’s boss calls them, “free range employees”. Along with the new duties, came production requirements that are monitored and measured by leadership. This change has been especially difficult for seasoned employees.

Morale is not the only concern within the unit. The unit is not hitting its assigned goals, which is a source of tension for all the employees, supervisory or not. Jenny’s time is spent explaining why an employee is not meeting their target goal and what the plan is for that

employee. This is a high stress position that Jenny has masterfully demonstrated she is capable of handling. She has chosen to stay in the difficult leadership waters and is determined to see her crew make it to shore. Her resilience is the beacon that lights the way for her and others to get there, her confidence is the compass pointing her in the right direction.

Throughout Jenny's career, she has always seen herself as part of a collective; she has not determined to stand out. She understands her role is leader and she is comfortable with it, but she thrives in a group setting. To visually portray her leadership and how she sees herself, Jenny provided an image of chess pieces all lined up equally with one having the shadow of the King behind it, denoting its leadership. "Everyone is an important part of the group and contributes to the overall mission. We are stronger together than divided."

A Portrait of Resilience and Prose for Jenny

I saw Jenny as a reflection of many Black women's hopes and dreams. I saw her as a woman wrapped in light brown skin, who was accepted based on her merit in the workplace. Her portrait reflects the diversity that exists in the Black community. To represent Jenny, I found a piece by Monica Stewart (n.d.) entitled, "*Every woman*". The portrait can be viewed at the artist's website: <http://monicastewart.com>.

Jenny's experience was uniquely her own and in many ways different from the other women included in this study. Jenny described the least amount of race and gender issues in the workplace. Her objectivity and the self-proclaimed "annoyingly optimistic" descriptor may lend itself to this. While Jenny did not directly experience many of the racial disparity and issues faced by other Black women in the federal government she was sympathetic to them.

She often stated the reasons she didn't think she experienced them as being location. I see Jenny in the portrait "Every Woman" because she is separate, yet infused with women who are different from her. She has her own story, but is willing to share in other women's stories as well. Jenny is a light skin, freckled face Black woman, who is not removed from the Black experience. She realizes she has a sisterhood of other Black women with various skin tones and struggles.

I see her as the fair skin woman to the right of the photo expressing compassion to the darker skinned woman. The compassion and affection gives the dark skin woman strength and changes her to accept friendship from the other woman in the photo. The kinship passes from woman to woman and generation to generation. I heard this in Jenny's stories and childhood memories. Jenny is not a light skinned woman who attempted to assimilate into a White culture and forgot where she came from when she became successful.

I found Jenny's compassion to be color blind and the eyes closed on the painting are yet another display of her commitment to her employees and co-workers. Jenny cares deeply for the people that work for her. The women in this portrait are intense; they look burdened, yet hopeful. This is representative of Jenny's leadership experience; she has been burdened by the depictions of her, yet she remains persistent in her mission. This painting has a silence to it that shouts that words are not required now to express what is being felt or said. When speaking with Jenny I sensed a silence that existed within her experience. I also know the silence that has existed between light and dark skinned women in the Black community, serving as a dividing force at times. The hair textures displayed also point to the variety that can be found among Black women in the workplace.

Jenny spoke of the women in her family affectionately and shared how they shaped her. In this art piece, I saw her experiences and the women who helped her become the woman she is today. Jenny remarked that the women in her family strove to stay on the right path and that she was never ashamed of them. The proximity of the women in this art piece shows the strong intimate bonds Jenny described. The closeness of the women and the tenderness displayed is warming. This is appropriate when trying to capture the essence of Jenny, her warmth was intriguing.

Her portrait is colorful, vibrant and full of life, because it involves a diverse set of people. This is depicted in this painting and Jenny's story. You can find color, humor, and determination in her experiences, locations she worked, and the diversity of the people who mentored her and the people that she is mentoring.

Ethnographic Poem

I just want to be seen and not misunderstood
 standing over here
 patiently waiting
 intentionally loving
 never judging
 Finding another one on the wrong channel
 Missing my intentions, motives, and my crime
 It's not an issue of competence
 though you use that as your excuse
 Culturally diverse
 braving new shores
 while wearing my leadership shoes
 Those were given to me
 I'm not the one who is blind
 open your eyes to a new reality
 Set down your excuses
 give the truth a chance
 to present its case

Over and over
 ratings
 colors
 flashing lights
 I object
 Your honor
 Warnings
 then finally
 I see
 Red
 What a powerful color
 Yet, it is still
 non-reflective of my leadership
 Possibly my beating heart
 the engine that keeps the train on the tracks
 keeps me coming back
 Daily to pour into you
 Despite what you are
 pouring into me
 and others
 about me
 You don't even know me
 You have yet to ask
 Who I am?

Passion is the charge
 Lock me up I'm guilty
 close the case, Judge
 Send the witnesses home

I confess
Don't need you to love me
with the love, I've shared with you
Compassion drove me to this place
I unbuckled my seat
stepping out of the vehicle
to stand up tall
To tell you
I demand respect
as payment for my services rendered
Because I gave away more than I took
What was left over?
What more do you want?
I've nothing left to give
I gave it all to you
objectively
passionately
finally

The Defense rests

Iyanla – The Resilient Woman Who Leads with a Quiet Inner Strength

I've always seen myself as a background singer.

—Iyanla, 2017

Iyanla and I met at a library near her current home town. It was a crisp, winter morning that provided me an uneventful two-hour drive to meet her. I was excited to hear her story and wondered what might be revealed. Iyanla had served in her position longer than the other two women I was interviewing. Upon arrival, we greeted each other with a hug and made our way to the interview room, where I set up. Within the first few minutes of the interview, we were laughing as we established rapport.

The library we met in was new; it had been open less than a year and smelled like new construction. The interview room we used had large glass doors that gave us visibility of the comings and goings of other library participants. I become so engrossed in the interview it felt that we were the only two people in the building until someone came so close to the room that we thought they were attempting to come in. In that moment, I realized how deeply invested I was into watching her and listening to her every word. We had not seen each other for at least a year since the annual conference held for those in our position. These annual gatherings always provided an opportunity to share experiences, struggles, and successes. It was a homogenous network of leaders who were all striving to find better ways of leading. Often, I could close my eyes and listen to those in the room as if I were speaking; we all seemed to be supervising the same people.

Cultural differences aside, each of us found this position to be challenging. Iyanla has struggled for acceptance in this position as well, but she has the added racial and gender components to contend with. She is not merely seen as the boss, who automatically draws

positional opposition. Her daily leadership assessments are fraught with bias, prejudice and at times discrimination. Iyanla is not concerned with this; she is comfortable in her skin and her ability to do her job. She is focused and does not hesitate to address real or perceived disrespect of her authority. Iyanla is a pro at moving rapidly through the four stages of the resilience cycle, I would discover she started this process in her early years.

She is married with three grown children and is the adoring grandmother to her grandchildren. She is in her late-50's and plans to retire within the next year or two. Iyanla is friendly and approachable, but stoic in her mannerism. She is tall, with beautiful dark skin and looks serious. She has served in leadership for 24 of her 27-year federal career. Prior to becoming a civil service employee, she spent six years in the United States Army. She is a woman who is about her business and you can tell this, just from being in her presence. In the past, Iyanla had been cordial to me at conferences and trainings and gave me great advice concerning my capabilities and where I would best fit in the agency. I have found her to be open in the past and I assumed this would be the case during the interview; I was correct.

Iyanla was transparent concerning her life and leadership. I felt honored to hear her story and throughout the interview I wrestled with how much she had bravely endured. As a portraitist, I gave a great deal of thought concerning how much detail to include in this narrative canvas. Iyanla's portrait was a two-dimensional work of art and its value contrasts is what helps us to see and better understand her story. Value contrast in art is the difference between light and dark and helps to define the shape of your participants. I chose to paint with dark and light shades that exist in her story. I attempted to add textures that would cause this portrait to stand apart from the canvas such as art created by an expressionist artist who emphasizes emotions in their work.

Do Not Despise the Days of Small Beginnings

Her humble beginnings began as one of 10 children. Iyanla was raised with seven brothers and two sisters. Her mother raised them by herself as the fathers of the children were virtually non-existent in the homes. All of her siblings did not have the same father, which resulted in a rainbow of skin colors of the children ranging from fair skinned children to three dark skin children. In her home, the shade of the children's skin resulted in preferential treatment and privilege. Iyanla's childhood was marked by a negative distinction in her treatment due to her dark skinned. "The kids in between you know with the caramel colored skin got ok treatment, the lighter skinned children got the best treatment and we got to me, [sic] the worst treatment, she stated concerning her childhood conditions."

This initial experience in the deteriorating phase of the resilience cycle led Iyanla to the adapting phase in her tender years. She was darker than many of her siblings and the treatment she received inside her family was reminiscent of the treatment she received in the work force. However, this seemed to prepare her for what awaited her as an adult. She remarked "I learned to, and I don't know if it's a good thing or a bad thing, but I learned to still myself against the name calling because I experienced it so much in my household." She went on to share that she was fed last, her hair was combed last, and the lighter skin siblings got better clothes and more attention from their mother. Iyanla was whisked into the recovering phase in her late teen years and hit the growing phase in her adult years.

She and I exchanged a lively discourse surrounding the disparate treatment due to skin color that exists within the Black community. As she described how her skin color impacted her childhood, I reflected upon mine. I shared with her that the first time I was called, "nigger" was by a light skin cousin. Iyanla and I were both the darkest children in our families growing up and

this honor taught us both how to handle racial disparity and future commentary concerning us. Our skin, hair, and ethnic features seemed as low hanging fruit when other children and co-workers wanted to find reasons to discriminate against us.

We both agreed that these early experiences helped soften the blows of workplace racial discrimination. Iyanla capitalized upon her strengths to overcome childhood adversities by academic achievements. This was a way to stand out amongst her siblings. She was the smart kid in the family and that came with bragging rights. Her mother took notice and was proud of her and took her report card to work. She bragged about young Iyanla to her co-workers and they gave her money for her good grades. Iyanla laughed hard and tilted her head as she said, “For every A I got, you know the people at work would give her \$5 to give to me, which I never got.” This caused Iyanla’s mother to encourage her young daughter to seek academic excellence and made report card days the day Iyanla was celebrated in her family.

Iyanla initially became a leader at the behest of others. She says, “it was a combination of um my counterparts, my uh fellow soldiers encouraging me to take on that role.” She was promoted to squad leader after receiving encouragement from her peers. Initially when asked in the military to lead a unit, her insecurity caused her to turn it down. She didn’t feel she would be respected leading an all-male unit. Eventually, she realized she had the respect of her peers and decided to lead them.

This leadership experience taught her many things about herself and her capabilities. She learned the concepts of teamwork and core leadership values. She considered her race as a barrier as she was concerned with the way that she was seen only as a young, Black girl in the Army. She was the only female in her unit and this led to insecurity, concerning her ability to lead. This insecurity stemming from the way others viewed her race and gender in a work setting

was demonstrated from the first day she arrived at her Army training. A Black drill sergeant yelled out to Iyanla, “Hey, you what is a little Black girl doing in this White Man’s Army?” Of all the soldiers running across the field that day, Iyanla is the only one singled out and highlighted because of her gender and race.

Standing in the wings was a male soldier who encouraged her to lead. He saw her potential and did not shy away from telling her that she was leadership material and that while she was not as vocal as her male peers, she possessed a quiet strength. This soldier would later become her husband and would once again, motivate her to apply for her current leadership position. After leading successfully in the U.S. Army and acquiring the rank of Sergeant, Iyanla sought a leadership position in the federal government because she wanted to make a difference. At first, she worked directly for another Black woman who was timid and afraid to make changes, this motivated Iyanla to become a leader, because she saw an opportunity to improve work place processes and conditions. Iyanla was immediately asked to take on a leadership position when she arrived at her federal agency. However, she was not eligible due to her entrance on duty date (EOD) not being one year in the agency. This prohibited her from accepting the position that leadership was confident she could perform. She ended up performing the duties anyway, until she could apply.

This was not the last time she would have to take on responsibilities without compensation or appointment. Prior to achieving her current position, she handled the duties for a year without pay, while the agency tried to fill the position. Iyanla finally approached a senior leader because she needed relief. Her boss immediately asked, “Why aren’t you in this position?” This boss, seemingly appalled that she had been acting in the position, but was not eligible to apply ensured she could apply. He researched the position and encouraged her to apply; being

sure not to violate any policies he recused himself from the hiring process. This leader set Iyanla on her path to senior leadership. She was hesitant to apply, but credits this leader and her husband with helping her to realize that she was suitable for the position. This time, it was not insecurity that was holding Iyanla back, it was the experiences she had during the prior year that caused her to second guess this role.

Iyanla waited until two minutes before the deadline to apply and one minute before the deadline, her boss called to ensure she had applied. This leader saw things inside of her that she didn't see herself; this is thematic concerning her experience. This happened in the military and in the federal government. It also happened during our interview. I saw strength in Iyanla that she didn't recognize. As I began to summarize some of her strengths, she looked surprised.

We are Climbing Jacob's Ladder

There is no way to tell Iyanla's story without speaking of her faith. It is what defines her and her resilience story. On her canvas is a glow that comes from a spiritual light that shines brightly from within her. Iyanla starts everyday with prayer and by listening to a gospel song entitled, "I'm gonna be ready," by Yolanda Adams (2001). She quoted the following lyrics for me in her interview that say, "I'm going to pass this test, with your strength and that everything that's put before me is a test and that you just want to see how I'm going to navigate through it."

Iyanla is a woman of deep Christian faith. I found myself engrossed in much of what she had to say and as I crafted her portrait, I felt she had the brush in her hand guiding me. Her story was powerful and demanded wide strokes to depict her challenges and short fine lines to highlight the detail of how she overcame. She relies heavily on guidance from God for her decision making and stress management. This resonated with me as, I too credit everything good in my life from the spiritual beliefs that I hold. My strength comes from my faith and it is not

manufactured by me, it is provided to me. Iyanla is living proof of this and shared, “I am a firm believer that we are not in control that God is in control.”

As Iyanla spoke, I continually visualized ladder rungs in my mind’s eye. It appeared that every set back only served as a ladder rung that allowed her to climb higher and higher. She shared a similar concept in her journal assignments. While discussing it, I shared my observation and Iyanla thought that it was a perfect analogy. Iyanla gazed at me intently with a smile as I shared my observation. She said, “on a ladder, certain ladders you can get, you know you start off with them being the same size and then eventually you know the rungs increase, the space between the rungs increase and stuff and that has truly been my life, but I wouldn’t trade.”

At this point in the conversation, Iyanla began to open up and shared some of her deepest hurts. Iyanla was excited to participate in the study; I believe this was in part because she is self-described as “shy”. She stated more than once that she is not a person to tell her story. She has always seen herself as more of a listener than a story teller. This saddened me when I reflected upon how many women could benefit from hearing her story. The adversity Iyanla has faced throughout her life could have easily crippled her and caused her to choose an alternate path. She acknowledges this and credits God with her chosen path. She watched some of her siblings take opposite paths. She noted that individuals have their own choices to make in response to what happens to them.

Concerning the “*Sunday Conversations*” painting (figure 2), Iyanla identified with the woman in red (see Figure 2). “When I saw this picture, the woman I gravitated to most was the lady in red.” She described her as standing in confidence and noticed that she has the Bible in her hand. Iyanla noted that she draws strength from the Bible. She believes that every answer a person needs can be found in the Bible. She noted several spiritual leaders as sources of comfort

and inspiration. She knows that she is resilient and credits “the hand of God” as the reason that she can conquer difficult situations and achieve great success. “I’m able to hold my own,” she says when commenting on her resilience.

Her resilience and humility has been recognized privately by one of her subordinates, who approached her with a request to write about her. She laughs and mimics herself telling this woman, “No, you are not going to do that.” I giggled as I thought about her sitting here today in front of me as I gather the information to write a piece concerning her. I don’t know if she connected the dots or not, but her story is being written, as it should be. Iyanla’s resilience and the fact that she is frequently found in the growing stage does not escape those who interact with her.

Third Person versus First Person

Her interview was intensely emotional for me as a Black woman. As a portraitist, I wanted to accurately depict her hurt and her sorrow, balanced against her hope and sheer will to succeed. Watching Iyanla was like watching a magnificent piece of steel. Her story at times seemed to be told in the third person, since she had distanced herself from the hardest parts of her life. She didn’t hide them or try to forget about them, she had been healed and released from the burden of carrying them in the present. She masterfully moves between the phases of the resilience cycle with no fear, there is a force that pulls her forward and ensures that everything she has endured will produce a harvest for her to sustain herself and others. Much of her story mirrors that of her shero, Iyanla Vanzant, who is a famed relationship coach, author, TV host, ordained minister, and motivational speaker. She greatly respects her and has found strength to see much of her story through that of Dr. Vanzant’s. Her chosen pseudonym name in this research was inspired by Dr. Vanzant.

As she recounts some of their similarities, she says, “We both were inspired by a slogan.” Vanzant’s slogan was seen on a sign while riding on a bus, it was a sign about domestic abuse, Iyanla’s sign was the Army slogan, “Be all you can be,” which she saw and wondered what they meant. Both signs changed these women’s lives for the better. Dr. Vanzant inspires Iyanla because Dr. Vanzant is outspoken in ways that Iyanla is not. “I think that she is one of the ones that, um, have a lot of battle scars, but um and she will speak on them, but she doesn’t rely on them to tell her story.” We discussed a concept that I use to describe the differences of hurting people. I explained the distinction to Iyanla as the walking dead, the walking wounded and the walking alive. Iyanla liked this concept and began to open up further concerning her feelings about her mother.

Speaking empathetically, she said, “Like Iyanla, I didn’t feel like I had a mother to raise, to show me how to be a woman, but she did raise us to get out of her house.” She felt like she developed the tools to succeed outside of her home. Both women’s mothers were functioning alcoholics and as I reframed her comments, she continued to expound and express empathy for what her mother experienced. Iyanla recognized that her mother was limited in her ability to provide more than what she did. There was no bitterness or hostility in Iyanla’s voice as she comes to terms with the difference between what she needed and what she received from her mother.

Retelling her past hurts was matter of fact, evoking little emotion from Iyanla, but I certainly felt her pain and had to prevent myself from delving too deeply into that story. I could have easily filled the canvas with this portion of the story. I watched her body language for clues and only found that she looked down when sharing a deep hurt. I became keenly aware that if I was not purposeful in this interview, I could miss her story of resilience by looking too deeply at

her pain. I am tender hearted when it comes to hurting people; I feel compelled to try to make them feel better.

Frequently, I do this through laughter, a kind word and a smile. I had to hold all my feelings at bay to stay in the role of researcher instead of nurturer. At times, I wanted to throw my arms around her, because I could see her as a child as she told her story. I saw myself in some of Iyanla's story and this was wonderful and traumatic at the same time. The goodness is evident in Iyanla's story; the fact that she sits before me today, composed and powerful is a testament to the faith she tightly clings to. As she began sharing more recent hurts, she is active and present as they are conveyed in the first person. Those wounds are fresh and while she is tending to them, they still exist.

Iyanla is the embodiment of resilience; she has survived the initial impact of numerous adversities and has gained wisdom and harmony with a spiritual source of strength. She is an accomplished leader who is the first Black woman to achieve the highest pay grade in her position within our government agency. Of this fact, she remains proud and perks up as she reminisces about this achievement. This is noteworthy as diversity within this federal agency is significantly under representative of the agency demographics. Iyanla is also surprised by this accomplishment because she does not have a college degree. She plans to pursue this upon retirement and does not disclose this to her peers, because she feels this will just give them one more reason to judge her or minimize her contributions. Iyanla received a partial scholarship out of high school, but quipped sarcastically, "A partial scholarship, without the other part, meant nothing." Iyanla, instead decided to join the military as a way of ensuring she could take care of her young daughter.

She faced fierce opposition and resistance from her family concerning this decision. Her mother told her there were only two reasons women went into the military, “to find a husband or become a bull dagger.” Iyanla recalled not knowing what this meant and when she found out she was surprised and rejected the notion that either of those reasons prompted her to join the military. While I did not face the same adversity concerning joining the military from my family that Iyanla did, I certainly had heard the skepticism that existed in the Black community concerning the military and the treatment a person of color would endure. Iyanla said, “I felt the fear and I felt what they were saying and I did it anyway because I don’t want people to dictate to me what I can and cannot do, I want to experience it for myself.”

Life for Me Ain’t Been No Crystal Stair

Iyanla provided the most emotionally charged interview with her raw honesty and thought-provoking leadership commentary. She is a mature, sensible woman who has not been hardened by life’s experiences. She seems to have used every trial as a ladder rung that has allowed her to climb higher. While she has achieved success in the federal government, she has carefully planned to bring as many other federal workers with her as possible. I am struck by how easy she shares personally challenging and intimate situations she has faced. Her gaze and expression never changes as she describes some of her most traumatic life events. She states them as realities, as one piece of a beautifully woven tapestry.

As I listened to her share her past, I realized that what she was describing was the equivalent of a tear in the fabric of her intricately woven life quilt that is not noticeable. This tear in no way takes away from the beauty or the purpose of the work of art that is her story. Throughout her life, she chose not to be a victim and for this reason she chose Langston Hughes poem, “*Mother to Son*,” as the one that best described her journey. “When I look back on my

journey, the bumps and the bruises always serve as a reminder of the past, you know the barriers I endured and was able to overcome.” Iyanla says she is not one to spill her milk in everyone’s house, she likes to deal with her issues internally. She feels Langston Hughes (1923) described her life perfectly, when he recited “life for me ain’t been no crystal stair,” because according to Iyanla, “Nothing that’s worth having comes easy to you because you have to put in the work.” Her words match those of the advice my grandmother provided me so many years ago. She feels like her life can be described as “survival.”

Even when Iyanla exclaimed, “This is difficult,” as she shared painful memories she was composed and confident as she continued to describe how she acquired her scars. She loved the metaphor of using a crystal stair, because she saw her staircase as Hughes (1923) described it in the poem with missing boards and accepting the fact that it is not an easy climb. The missing boards caused her to take big leaps at times to take the next step. “One of the biggest leaps, but the best leap I could have made was to the military.” The military is where she gained confidence and learned the tools she needed to become a functional, stable adult. She touts it as the best first decision she made in her life. Despite the difficulties she has faced, she feels the things she endured have made her a good person inside and out. Life has made her an advocate for those that others see negativity in. She seeks to find the good in people.

In the workplace, she is often found mentoring employees and offering advice concerning how they can improve their marketability. She has taken criticism in this area from other Black employees, who somehow feel that because she is a Black, she is obligated to look out for other Black people. Facing this criticism head on, she sought insight from them to understand their perspective. Older Black employees have a problem with her and feel that she has not done anything to help them. They believe she can and should hand out promotions, simply because

she is in a position of power. Dispelling this myth has been difficult, as they see White employees promoted instead of them.

They erroneously feel loyalty should be a factor in them getting a promotion. She has attempted to encourage them to enroll in classes or gain new skills to become competitive; instead they chose to blame Iyanla. While Iyanla's peers gave her positive comments on the climate survey, they did not provide comments. According to Iyanla, "they won't acknowledge that I am equal to them in performance." Iyanla's White colleagues and superiors have alienated her in the workplace. She has been undermined and intentionally left in the dark on administrative matters. It is the portraitist's opinion that Iyanla is in the recovering phase of her most recent workplace adversities; she is coping and understands what the status quo, but she is realistic that she may not be able to effect change.

Last year, she considered resigning based on the blatant disrespect she faced from her Deputy and her executive leadership. Unaware that her Deputy was being pitted against her, Iyanla thought her Deputy was insubordinate until she discovered the executives were encouraging this behavior. Her Deputy was a younger White woman and was privy to information that Iyanla was not. Iyanla decided to inquire into this matter and challenged her employee. Unfortunately, Iyanla discovered she was once again not being given the respect her position garnered. She was surprised to find the level of disrespect she received from her superiors and once again Iyanla was thrust into the deteriorating phase briefly. She took her proof to the head of the office after deciding to fight this injustice. "If everyone is working around me, then I know that I'm being set up for failure because they want this White Deputy to sit in my seat and I said, she can't sit in my seat because it's not vacant." After the shock wore off, Iyanla immediately moved to the adapting phase where she decided that she would not leave,

but find a way to adjust to her surroundings. Moving to the recovery phase allowed Iyanla to begin work to repair the relationship with her Deputy.

Finding My Voice

Throughout her career, Iyanla has been subjected to stereotypes concerning her race and gender, yet she remains hopeful that things are going to get better. “I am often the only Black face at the table,” she points out. She feels that even though her opinion is sought, her voice is not as loud as her White counterparts. She sees her role is minimized compared to her White GS-15 peers. While her opinion is sought concerning how to deal with Black employees who have performance issues, it is not for White employees. Her leadership team gives the impression that there is a difference in the way Black employees and White employees should be disciplined. “The team that I work for is known to be a part of the good ole boy society, so they have privileges that I certainly don’t have, but the privileges are starting to go away.”

She describes her biggest challenge as always being compared to others, personally and professionally, even though they are not in charge of the same career fields and specialized functions. She has an existence of having to over prepare in the work place. “I just always feel I have to know way more than I’m supposed to know to be considered a valued source.”

According to Iyanla, stereotypes abound in the federal government that Black women leaders are weak, emotional, too assertive or not solid in their decision making, and angry. We shared dialogue around the prevailing “angry Black woman” stereotype that exists in American society. I have certainly fought this “ghost” my entire career being too afraid to share my true emotions for fear of being labeled with this demonic imagery.

I understood perfectly what Iyanla experienced navigating the pressures of leadership with the extra burden of judgement based on preexisting caricatures. The previous stereotypes

lead countless Black women to become hypervigilant concerning their performance in the workplace. Iyanla described this notion that Black women must work twice as hard to be seen as credible. I wholeheartedly agree with her assertion and this too, has been the way I've operated as a leader in the federal government. I have heard that from numerous Black women in my career and was told that as a young Black woman entering the workforce.

Iyanla noted the reason for this is due to her work being judged harsher than her peers. This was proven at staff meetings and within her executive leadership team. Her peers are also given greater monetary awards and higher performance ratings for working on the same projects. Most of the questions in meetings were directed at her section. She prepared in advance for this, as she began to see the pattern. Iyanla was matter of fact as she expressed this; there was no anger in her voice over the perceived inequality. Disparity exists in social settings and work settings for Iyanla and since it was habitual, she adjusted to it and sadly expected it.

She realizes that Black women are not the only women who face stereotypes in leadership roles and added, "I think women; every woman can wear some of those same hats." Iyanla has certainly seen this and experienced the sting of being left out. Discovering that her peers have attended some function with the boss after the fact, she keeps her feelings to herself. Iyanla stated, "I can't come to something I don't know about." This is her inner voice responding to a peer who casually stated, "We had social hour, oh, you should have come." Iyanla has no fear as she must approach difficult conversations and confrontations. She uses humor to illustrate that she is strong. "When people say with her Black self, it doesn't faze me." She recently had to tell her light skin sister after she referenced her dark skin negatively, "You said that as if that was supposed to hurt me, I've been Black all my life."

She is currently full of hope, because her new boss is a Black woman and she has already begun to make changes for the better. The addition of her new boss, helped Iyanla transition to the recovering phase of the resilience cycle in the workplace and as we talked I could envision her moving shortly to the growing phase. Iyanla feels much more included in her leadership team in the past six months since the new boss arrived. Concerning her fellow team members, she says, “I can see some of their mannerisms that they don’t like necessarily working for, you know an African American woman or a woman period.” Iyanla admires this woman because she makes each of them feel that they have an equal voice. Her voice has been silenced and muted during several parts of her life. I wondered if this is what led her to be quiet or if this is her natural tendency.

While she is a woman of few words, when she speaks it is appropriate and thoughtful. She frequently uses her voice to assist others and to provide counsel to her peers and employees. Iyanla said, “I know how to direct my passion in an even keel tone,” she considers herself a silent force to be reckoned with. The military is where Iyanla found her voice and she continues to find it. Reflecting on her first military leadership role she shared, “From there I feel like I found my voice.” She grew up in a manner where she did not question her mother and often kept her feelings and thoughts to herself. In her current role, she has learned to assert herself and uses her voice to shape the next generation of leaders. She hopes that she has been a beacon of light to show the voiceless that they can achieve what she has.

How I Got Over

Iyanla’s story touched me in a way that I was not necessarily prepared for during academic study. I found myself sharing easily with her and there was an instant identification with her emotions and her experiences. Often, the connection I felt and the energy in the room

was comforting. That Saturday morning in the library, she was real in a way that was tangible. I identified with her leadership experiences as if we were working for the same people.

Iyanla came alive when describing herself using the journal assignments. During this part of the interview, she was much more relaxed, laughed louder, smiled more, talked with her hands and became visually interactive. The journal assignments and the answers she provided, allowed me to get to know her in greater detail. Iyanla draws strength from other people's stories. "I love listening to other people's stories and their challenges." She believes sometimes it doesn't have meaning to them, but feels she can glean something from their experiences. I shared more of my story with Iyanla than the other women; this could be attributed to our ties to the military. There is a bond that exists with military women which typically results in an immediate comradery.

Iyanla's story began with a mother who while challenged, inspired her. "She showed me different types of ways to be a leader by being independent, resourceful and depending on yourself, but always looking for other ways to better your environment and better yourself." Her mother taught her key life skills that she has been able to use as a leader. Iyanla's mother modeled resilience for her and growing up she admired her ability from afar to keep her family together. Expounding upon her capabilities is one of the key strategies used by Iyanla to overcome barriers.

She found that being a team player complemented her nicely and gave her opportunities to accomplish the mission. She began to volunteer for assignments that afforded her ways to acquire new knowledge and skills. She also became strategic in how she dealt with her leaders. She turned the tables on the stereotypical beliefs held about her and used them to her advantage. Iyanla is a wise woman and I learned a great deal by listening to her. Her confidence in herself allows her to walk in humility. To gain her leaders trust, Iyanla has devised strategies that work

with new leaders. She is reserved in the beginning of the relationship, allowing time for them to get to know her and her abilities. She seeks their guidance and does not want to appear intimidating. This was to ensure that they were not threatened by her.

Iyanla is determined to gain their trust in the early stages of the relationship. She is a firm believer in including people into the decision-making process. She has relied heavily on her peer network of employees who hold her position in each state in lieu of mentors. Iyanla has not had mentors in her career and cites this as something she wishes she had. She uses meditation and prayer as a means of coping with whatever the day may bring. She also encourages other women to “stay in church.” She has found that a spiritual foundation in one’s chosen spiritual affiliation is necessary for success. Concerning religion, she proclaims, “You have to make sure that its solid and that you stay connected to it, because things can go awry real fast if you don’t have that connectivity with God.”

Reading books is her favorite pastime. “It usually centers me, grounds me, and for me to think logically and deal with the problem at hand.” Iyanla copes by using sheer will and determination. Speaking of her emotions and past wounds she does not intend to hide them. She sets out to, “Not mask it, own it, but replace it with a better memory.” She realizes that she is responsible for her decisions and she chooses carefully between menus of planned actions. She knows that others may not have been able to survive what she has, and laughs as she says, “Girl if you can get through that and not you know, not having to share the full stories with anybody and you know what happened and you can get through it...you are God’s favorites.”

Iyanla credits her grandchildren and her husband, who is wise and supportive as sources of inspiration. She typically takes 10 or 15 minutes to reflect upon her day to help her with understanding what she has just experienced. She shares some issues with her husband, but

quipped, “I don’t want it fixed, I just want it heard.” She knows she can fix it herself, but shares snippets with her husband just to get the issue off her chest.

While her race is at the forefront of her daily leadership experience, it has not impacted her ability to gain employment and it never has. It has impacted the way in which she exists within the organization, how she is respected and how her leadership is judged. She worked in a situation, where she has been unable to trust her leaders. While issues with her boss remained, the team she supervised is loyal and respects her leadership. Iyanla, remains dedicated to the mission and the people who work with and for her.

I’ve Been Fighting All My Life

As I listened to Iyanla describe her journey, I was in awe at the strong, brilliant woman seated in front of me. Her strength occupied its own seat at the table, during the interview. I could feel myself seated in meetings with her and sensed her agony as another boss snubbed her talent, listening to one of her peers make programmatic recommendations in her work area. This resonated with me, because I had experienced this numerous times during the six years I sat in the leadership position that Iyanla did. However, Iyanla handled it with an emotional grace and an ease that I did not. Iyanla was in the recovering stage and I was often tossed back and forth between the deteriorating phase and the adapting phase.

She declared, “From early on, I’ve been a fighter.” Iyanla doesn’t have to prove anything to herself, but she does seek to show others that she is strong. Iyanla clearly articulated the challenges she faced in the federal government due to her race. She understood her dark skin was one of the first things people took notice of when she sat at the leadership table. Nonetheless, she held her head high with a smile on her face, prepared to work twice as hard. Iyanla admitted that initially she was a little ashamed of her black skin, but says, “It’s so funny that the things that

you initially start off as being ashamed of is what I hold [*sic*], uh I embrace the most.” She loves being Black and hopes to instill the same love of it in her daughter and her granddaughters. Racial slurs no longer hurt her as she realizes that ignorance is to blame for much of the misperceptions she faces.

One way in which Iyanla has effectively fought injustice is with her faith, it is what grounds her and foreshadows her responses. She continues to be good to the people who try to harm her or discount her. Iyanla has forgiven her mother and the many people who have wounded her during her life. This includes those in the workplace; she expressed this as she spoke of the situation that caused her to consider resigning from her current position. In the end, she decided to stay because she didn’t want her employees to suffer and she didn’t want anyone pushing her out of the organization until she was ready to leave.

An image of hot air balloons with one lower than the others is what Iyanla provided to depict how she sees herself positioned in her team. Her balloon is the only one with restraints and chains on it and is not equal in distance to the other balloons. Iyanla explained that she continues to feel restricted in her workplace, and endures questioning when her peers do not. She used a photo of interlocked chains to show an image of how she feels others view her leadership. The chain links are all silver, but the one in the middle is red. She feels she is the red link. She said, “I know that they know that I add value to the team, but they won’t recognize me as a full-fledged team member.”

Her skin color and race has caused her to stand out her entire life. In the image she provided, all the other chains converge on the red chain link and are interconnected. Iyanla feels good about knowing that she is the hub of the administrative branch and that she is relied upon by her employees. Ironically, she finds that non-supervisory, young, White employees are the

most supportive of her leadership. Older Black employees have proven to be skeptical and cynical concerning her.

Iyanla is a risk taker and feels that if she fails then it provides her an opportunity to do it in a different way. While she has always been a fighter, she has always been a nurturer and a motivator. She took time at the close of the interview to tell me how proud she was of me and even shared with me what woman she thought I was in the “*Sunday Conversations*” portrait (see figure 2). She said assertively, “and the other thing that is synonymous with you is sunshine, you know so, you’ve always been bubbly and a ray of light and that’s what she exudes right there.”

Iyanla saw herself as the woman in red, this woman didn’t appear to be the outspoken one and she was struck by the way she was standing confidently. She said, “I never want to stand out in a crowd and stuff, I always like to give someone that opportunity first and if nobody does then I’ll take the role.” She continues to stand tall as she seeks to overcome negative perceptions found on her climate survey. She doesn’t know that she has overcome them, but continues to mentor her employees in the hopes that it will make a change.

On several occasions, it appears Iyanla skipped the deteriorating phase and immediately began her resilience work in the adapting phase. While Iyanla has fought racism, sexism and injustice in the work place, she has decided not to fight people. She chooses to see the best in them. This was proved when she sent a letter to her staff encouraging them to embrace the Deputy after her public display of insubordination. The new executive has attempted to reestablish a relationship between the two leaders and Iyanla is open to this. The employees however were not, until Iyanla encouraged them to do so. Several employees told Iyanla that they appreciated her email and would attempt to establish relationships with the Deputy out of

respect for her. Iyanla is a class act and leads with the same inner quiet strength that was her signature leadership trademark over 30 years ago.

A Portrait of Resilience and Prose for Iyanla

There is a natural rhythm that coincides with Iyanla's journey and mine. As a dancer, I could have told her story through dance or song. I could envision it in my mind and felt it in my body as I conducted the analysis. My head seemed to move back and forth and my eyes raced to and fro from watching her expressions and the paper that held my field notes. If my experience with her is a dance, the song was the moans and hums of agreement, the sighs of sorrow and the pregnant pauses she took as she carefully chose what words worked best to debut her journey.

Her story is breathing, revolving, and it demands to be told. I chose a piece of art entitled, "*Flow*" by Monica Stewart (n.d.) to express another way in which I saw Iyanla and it can be viewed at <http://www.monicastewart.com>. The picture shows four Black dancers in perfect alignment and step, reaching back behind them. I felt that is what Iyanla has done and will continue to do. She reaches back not to her past, but to the next generation of leaders that are coming up behind her. She has made her mark in the federal government and wants to help with her hands to show others the way. Her black skin is prominent, not hidden and she realizes she does not stand alone in her efforts. She is in line with other Black women who extended their hands to her and helped her in the past. They did not all do this perfectly, but each of them extended their hands nevertheless.

This picture does not have every woman's arm at the same height. They are individual dancers swaying to what appears to be the same tune and using the same movement, but it looks different. They each have their own identity, this is seen by looking at their hairstyles and this is a reminder that every leader has their own unique style. This is depictive of Iyanla's upbringing; her outstretched arm looks different to her daughter than her mother's outstretched arm appeared to her. Both mothers reached out with the love they had for their daughters to impart their wisdom to prepare them for the future.

The women's body language in this picture is strong and signifies that while they are reaching back they are fully prepared to move forward. The dancer's legs are positioned to the front, which indicates that they are going to take those who grab their hands with them. The women are in great physical shape; their form fitting attire confirms this fact. This leads to their preparedness as dancers who need stamina for performances. I saw Iyanla attune with her spiritual needs that led her to sustained resilience for her leadership performances as well.

Iyanla is seeking to impart her knowledge and how she moved up in the federal government to anyone who is interested. The flow of the dancers in this picture suggests that they are moving, in motion, and will continue to do so. This reminds me of Iyanla who plans to retire soon, but is already making plans for what comes next. She knows there is life after retirement and will continue to flow with the natural rhythm of her life. It is safe to say that Iyanla is thriving more often than not, and this was seen in her story and the details she shared.

Ethnographic Poem

Trouble, trouble everywhere
 Whether I looked high or low
 Stepping on the ladder rung of life
 gaps seem inappropriately sized
 For my young, tender feet
 feared numerous falls, yet I
 Never lost my grip
 miraculously getting back up
 From missteps and stumbles
 worked twice as hard
 determined not to fail
 Safety rail securely positioned
 Invisible inspiration
 divinely appointed toes
 Black skin wrapped around my frame
 First thing seen
 not the last thing gained
 yet, this Black skin and Red heart
 propel me forward
 Not sure why or how
 Surprisingly unable to be crushed
 catastrophic blows
 strike my bones
 A cruel count began
 One-Two-Three
 I was only down momentarily
 not permanently out
 Heaven and Earth's Savior stopped the count
 proclaiming,
 "Strength is your superpower"
 I am cloaked in an invisible cape and
 impenetrable protection against
 merciless Wind
 bewildering Hail
 unfathomable Rain
 Elements meant to hinder
 oddly caused me to
 ignore adversity
 Rise defiantly
 Soar astonishingly
 instead

Division and inequality
 Invite bias and blindness to

sit at the leadership table
 Let me introduce myself
 no need
 we've met before
 I was much younger then and
 you were
 hoping to stop my flow
 but you were and are still
 no match for the eternal God
 residing internally
 Found deep beneath this dark skin
 He granted me
 The gift of Resilience
 To stave off the
 howling wolves
 marauding hyenas
 stony Jackals
 trying to obliterate me

Secret struggles
 seeking acceptance
 Given freely
 to those
 lighter than I
 Beautiful, unstained
 Black skin furnished
 Joy
 Comfort
 Peace
 a place to be
 Personally Authentic
 My Spiritual evolution
 began when I was
 Awoken
 The Emotional evolution
 I chose to be
 Unspoken
 This Leadership evolution
 conjures a lyrical verse
 set to a symphonic melody
 Sing it with me, now

“Hallelujah, I remain Unbroken.”

The Group Photo and Prose



Figure 3. *The Islanders* by Laverne Ross

Laverne Ross is an African-American artist who is well known for his paintings of Black dancers. I reached out to him through e-mail to determine what inspired him to paint this picture entitled “The Islanders (n.d.) (figure 3).” Mr. Ross responded, “they are Moslem, [sic] women from east Africa, their faces are uncovered, because they don’t know I’m looking at them (like a fly on the wall, so to speak).” I felt this portrait accurately reflects what my experience as the portraitist has been with my participants; the women in my portrait all experienced feeling hidden as Black women leaders in their federal agency. Certainly, this spoke to how I felt when I was leading my unit; but just as Mr. Ross was inspired to paint the women he saw, I too, wanted to paint the women I saw.

The desert is the perfect setting for a visual representation of Black women's leadership. It is akin to what the women described in their interviews, the way in which they feel positioned in leadership. Isolation, loneliness, and exclusion are three words that describe some of the challenges faced by Ruth, Jenny and Iyanla. Each of them experienced hardships, setbacks and adversity as they attempted to navigate this dry leadership terrain. Over time, each of the women leaders learned to navigate through the desert; they ultimately learned how to survive in it. This new landscape did not deter them from getting to their destination, which was senior leadership.

Each woman learned to thrive after experiencing the full resilience cycle, each woman began with the deterioration of adversity, during this phase they felt the desert heat and thought it was unbearable at times. When they progressed to the adapting cycle, they found other women that helped them to adjust to their situation and assisted them with progression to the recovering stage. In this stage, they learned that there was beauty to be found in the desert and their initial devastation. Miraculously, they began to grow and after reflecting on their situations, they realized that they were stronger and better. This strength was useful as they encountered new situations in the desert, the landscape had not changed, but they had and this was encouraging.

The women in this portrait are closely mirrored with Ruth, Jenny, Iyanla and myself. I see Iyanla as the woman in blue, she is slightly ahead of the other women in the photo; she is leading the charge. Iyanla is the most seasoned leader in the group and is prepared to exit the federal government; before she leaves, she is seeking to impart wisdom and lessons learned. She knows where she is heading, because her faith has been her compass in the federal government. She is leaving a legacy in which the women trailing will be able to follow. Iyanla's face is uncovered, she is proud of the freedom she's found in embracing her race, while it has been a problem for some in the workplace; it is no longer a hindrance for her. She is boldly looking

forward, declaring, “Follow me, I know the way.” She will walk with her head high ensuring those following her make it to their destination.

Ruth is the woman in green, which is the second woman from the left on the photo; she is the woman I deem as the “watcher” of the group. She is greatly concerned with protecting the woman near her. She is aware of her surroundings and does not want to be caught off guard by surprise attacks. Ruth is brave; she decided that she would be a front-runner at the urging of the village elders. Ruth knows countless other Black women who were not willing to venture into the desert until they knew it was safe. Ruth set aside her fear and decided she would find out if it was safe. She has sent word back to the village, proclaiming, “Come on.” Now she is prepared to set up camp for them and plans to train them upon arrival to be able to be self-sufficient. She is tough and does not shy away from telling those following her to pick up the pace.

Jenny, with her face nearly covered is wearing peach and is the first woman on the right side of the photo; Jenny allows you to see only what she wants you to see. She is careful with her emotions, but ironically, she is the “giver” in the group. Jenny provides an environment of solidarity that is necessary to maintain the pace needed to make it to their destination. Jenny’s covering is by choice, because while she is approachable and friendly, she does not easily share her pain. Instead, she focuses on mission accomplishment and invests her time in solving the problems that exist within the group.

She is adventurous and sticks close to the leaders that provide her counsel. She seeks their guidance as she plans to pass it on. Jenny has been burned in the past by the desert sun, but laughs and says, “Don’t worry about me, how can I help you?” She is strong and capable; she has a survivor’s instinct and has packed enough to sustain herself and other members of the group. Holding up the rear, I see myself in the pink ensemble. I represent the generation of rising

leaders who have the privilege to walk in the paths that the previous generations have paved for us. This has allowed us to enjoy some leisure's that they may not have. They are not jealous; they celebrate with us, because they count it as a victory.

While I am walking with them and carefully watching their steps, I am conscious that I do not have to duplicate them. I am creating my own unique set of steps. I gain strength by seeing them in front of me. This gives me the unique opportunity to watch them. As they detect dangers, they yell back to warn me and quietly point them out as we pass by. I feel fortunate to be a member of this group. I take careful mental notes, to share with the women who are behind me. I aspire to emulate Ruth, Jenny, and Iyanla's unique gifting's, but I do not covet their gifts, because I am confident in my own. I realize my selection to this group validates I have something to offer. My offering to this group, during this journey is that of "Scribe." I conceptualized myself as the woman on the far left of the photo, walking slightly behind the other women.

From my optic, I have the best view to catalogue the journey and the women for the current and future generations. My choice of the pink garment for the journey confirms that I am the baby of the group, I am cheerfully noting the sights and sounds while shouting, "Hey you guys, did you see that?" Of course, they have seen it before; this is not their first time in the desert. They are not annoyed by my innocence and my exploration, they are careful to encourage it, because they know it will assist in my learning.

What I did not realize when we set out on this journey was that these women agreed to this trip, for my sake, not theirs. They did not need to make this trek across the desert; they chose to teach me something. I receive grace that the more seasoned women would not necessarily receive; I am still learning, growing, and evolving. All of us are, but it is vital for my survival

and this means they all pour a little extra into me. Each of the women has genuinely endeared herself to me, it was natural because they are nurturing and I feel safe and accepted.

I know that they have high expectations for me and I plan to make them proud. They withheld nothing from me in the hopes that it would cause me to go further than they did. We are not in competition with each other, trying to determine who arrives first, we are teammates. Each of us holds an invisible baton in our hands. It should be passed from woman to woman until they no longer run. In this portrait, I imagine that when one of the women gets tired, the other women rally to assist. This is true of my experiences working with these women in the agency we shared. I would fall and one of them would be willing to pick me up. When I saw their faces, it helped me to know that I too, could continue pursuing my goals. Seeing my face amongst leaders was critical to my morale and motivation.

The four of us are seeking an expected end and we will not let anything or anyone prevent us from reaching our goal. Our bare feet tell that story; clearly, they have been toughened over time. The desert is a dangerous place to walk without shoes. The women in this photo do not look worried about blisters, scorpions, snakes, or hidden debris; because they know, their feet will not fail them. Mr. Ross's print reminds us of Black women's resilience; the setback of not having shoes, does not prevent us from walking or reaching our destination. There is an energy that guides us, a force that protects us and an expectation that we will not only survive, we will thrive.

The Black Woman's Math Problem

What about me equals subtraction?

A perceived difference between you and I

Whenever I arrive

You don't recognize

What is directly in front of you

Inside of me

Hidden treasure

Is found

Waiting to be discovered

Yet the pirates continue

To steal what is not theirs

The subtraction begins

When I walk in the room

Join the team

Sit at the table beside you

Being the only shade of Brown

In an ocean of Indifference

Towards the tone of skin

That I did not choose

But gladly accept

Every day is a good day

To be

Who I am

As I subtract

You are not as smart

You are not as pretty

Your hair is not straight enough

Your words are not valuable

You have less potential

You are not well spoken

You are not equal

Your leadership is not noteworthy

You are not light enough

You are less refined

You are not welcome

Your decisions are questionable

You are not a man

You are less reliable

Your judgement requires scrutiny

You are not White

You are not good enough

From my ears	Your words
From my eyes	Your glares
From my back	Your weapons
From my nose	Your stench
From my heart	Your hurt
From my mouth	Your comparisons
From my soul	Your tattoo
I am who I am	
Unapologetically	
I do not take away	
I add	
Yet	
I am more	
Than addition	

I AM A MULTIPLIER

Summary

In Chapter IV, this portraitist provided the setting of the portraits, and an individual portrait of Ruth, Jenny, and Iyanla. The portraitist also included web page links to artwork and original poetry to describe each woman through the portraitist's eyes. Chapter IV ends with a group portrait that includes how the portraitist is set within the context of the group and an original poem that depicted the portraitist's response to journal assignment number four. This poem was written from the portraitist's perspective of Black women as a collective group. Chapter V includes the results, emerging themes, recommendations for future work, and reflections of the portraitist. It also introduces the fictional character known as Sarah and her portrait.

Chapter V

Results, Recommendations, and Reflections

I like for people to say I'm kind. It means that I'm still learning and that I'm able to forgive.

—Maya Angelou, Harvard Business Review, 2013

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of the Black women leaders in the federal service related to their (a) challenges/barriers faced in leadership and (b) strategies used to overcome those challenges/barriers. The participants provided data for this study through the discovery of the dynamics that led them to their senior level leadership position. A portraiture research method was appropriate in determining the lived experiences of the Black women senior leader's working in the United States federal government. In the portraiture methodology themes emerge from an iterative and generative process and they give the data shape and form. (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). The themes that emerged in this research centered on identity, the role of informal leaders/mentors, work/life balance, forgiveness and servant leadership. The themes derived from the one-on-one interviews, phone call follow ups interviews, journal assignments, the portraiture impressionistic journal and organizational document reviews. Based on my findings, the Black women leading in the U.S. federal government are marked with resilience. Throughout the interviews, all the participants made remarks that reinforced her resilience and described how race and gender impacted her leadership, or not. To protect the participant's identity and responses, information and identifiers were modified.

Black women and their leadership experiences vary widely; each woman provided a different perspective to consider her resilience. Each of the women varied in skin tone and this potentially impacts their acceptance in their environments. Iyanla spoke openly of her dark skin and how that impacted her in childhood and in the workplace. Jenny who was the fairest of the women interviewed, noted the least amount of discriminatory work place encounters. Ruth often

surprised people because they anticipated someone with white skin instead of the woman with brown skin in front of them. Regardless of their skin tone or color, each woman achieved senior level status in the organization.

Nina Simone's song "Four Women" was instrumental in this portrait to depict four archetypes of Black women. Her song portrayed Black women beginning from slavery to modern day. There are four main characters described in this song, Aunt Sarah, Saffronia, Sweet Thang, and Peaches. Nina Simone takes great care to describe each of the characters physical traits such as her skin color and her hair texture, because they are key components concerning how other people view Black women (Pierpoint, 2014). Each character provides their viewpoint concerning societal treatment and the name that was chosen for her.

Ruth, Jenny and Iyanla had an immediate reaction to the stanza that describes Aunt Sarah. The lyrics, "strong enough to take the pain inflicted again and again," resonated with each woman. Strength and pain was synonymous with each of their leadership stories. It became apparent as I interviewed these women that none of them controlled their leadership narratives or identities in the workplace. Just as the women in the song, their identities were chosen for them in most cases based upon archaic stereotypical perceptions of their Black skin, gender or by their status as leaders.

The portraitist chose the art piece, entitled, "Wings" (n.d.) by artist Gwen Gorby to visually display what the pooled image of the women in this study appeared to look like from the portraitist's perspective (see figure 4). As I walked through the art gallery, this painting seemed to resonate with me. As soon as I saw it, I said, "that's Aunt Sarah." From the look on her face and the tired lines around her mouth evidenced that, this woman had endured trials and

persevered. I confirmed this with the artist when I reached out to her to inquire about the painting and her inspiration.

The artist Gwen Gorby was inspired to paint this portrait in the image of what she described as a, “mothering angel that radiated the strength and beauty within all women.” G. Gorby (personal email communication, May 17, 2017) The Black woman who is featured in this painting was described as a shy woman who gained strength from her Christian faith. When asked to expound upon the actual woman who inspired the artwork, Gorby stated, “She was a single mom and was doing everything she could to provide for her children.” G. Gorby (personal email communication, May 17, 2017) This image was most fitting to describe the women in this study who were all women of faith by their own admissions and behaved as surrogate mothers to their employees. While they have seen dark places, the white garment is a symbol of the hope that has wrapped itself around the Black women in this study.

In my final individual portrait of the Black female senior leader in the U. S. federal government, I will attempt to paint a portrait of a fictional character named, Sarah by combining the portraits and lived experiences of Ruth, Jenny, Iyanla and the portraitist. Through this portrait I will seek to portray who Sarah is and what she feels in her leadership role in the Federal Government, based upon the emerging themes of this research. All the quotes are direct quotes from the women interviewed or the portraitist. The name Sarah was chosen, because that is the character that the women in this study converged upon in one of the journal assignments.

Sarah – The One Who Leads with Authenticity, Integrity, Faith and Love

Figure 4. *Wings* by Gwen Gorbey

Theme 1 - Mama Duck Leadership (the Black girl's first leadership role model)

The first theme to emerge from the interview data was the role of elder Black women and in particular the impact Sarah's mother had on her leadership success. Mothers and grandmothers served as a key contributor to the woman that Sarah is today, they were her first role models (Werner & Smith, 1982). There was much said about the early days of her life and what she learned by viewing her mother's actions throughout the years (Reed, 2006). As a child growing up Sarah remembered, "I viewed her as a leader because she was instrumental in keeping our family together despite all of the obstacles she had to endure in her lifetime." While Sarah noted

other leaders such as a Jewish woman and two men, one Black and one White as encouragers in the workplace, she credits her mother and/or grandmother as her first leadership mentor.

As a child, Sarah followed this woman closely, just as baby ducks follow the mama duck. The ducklings follow as the mama duck teaches them to navigate the world. As the duckling grows up and becomes a leader herself, she begins to teach others how to navigate the world and the cycle continues. Sarah described this phenomenon as she pronounced her desire to lead her team effectively with the traits she gained decades ago. The patience displayed as she described the numerous challenges she faced also fits the duck, which is figuratively and literally known to let water roll off her back.

The traits and lessons she learned from her mother and/or grandmothers were what helped her as she navigated the sometime torrential leadership waters (Reed, 2006). Sarah saw resilience through a child's eyes and posited, "No matter how tired she was, we never knew it; because she was about her, you know, business at hand making sure her family was taken care of." Sarah learned independence from her mother and that has helped her immensely in her leadership role, especially because she rarely had a formal mentor to assist her in the organization. When I asked Sarah directly about the first Black woman leader she identified as a leader, she began to smile and said,

Again, I mostly just think about my mother and my great- grandmother you know, they didn't work and have leadership roles like work, it was just mainly in our private life and family life just kept things going, kept things organized and kept people on the right track.

Sarah admitted she didn't get all the tools she needed from her mother, but acknowledged what she had received continues to be part of her leadership today. She credits her mother with being

industrious, resourceful, efficient, patient, and empathetic. These traits are seen in Sarah's leadership and are necessary in the position she currently holds. Sarah was not raised with any limitations concerning her race, she stated, "but growing up they never said ok, you're black and you're this, you're black and you're this." Sarah values education and learning and is frequently found educating in her current role. While she reached the top administrative position in her office, she continues to challenge herself.

When Sarah was growing up, she watched as her mother took care of the family (Valtierra, n.d.). While Sarah has worked with a multitude of leaders and seen a myriad of leadership styles, her mother's leadership had the greatest impact on her, even over than any of the formal leaders encountered in federal service. Sarah stated, "I couldn't compare her to the leaders of today, but to me she was the first leader I was exposed to." Sarah has been under formal leaders much longer than the 18 years she spent in her mother's home, yet her formative years set the foundation for the leader she is today. The elder Black women who raised Sarah had no leadership theories to draw upon; no strategic visions vetted by executive leaders or statistically proven research to point to as none of them were students of leadership.

Striking a balance between the wisdom earned and the wisdom taught, Sarah reported her desire to pass both types of wisdom off to the next generation of Black women in the workplace. Sarah has a hard-won victory story that she desires to share; she was ready to prepare other ducklings to take her place at the head of the formation. She lit up with joy at the assertion of leaving words or guidance to the next generation. Sarah's daily existence and routine included this impartation to employees in the workplace. She mimics what she witnessed as the women in the recesses of her memory poured into her consciously and unconsciously (Valtierra, n.d.).

The portraitist was moved at the genuine care and concern displayed for the federal employees Sarah supervises, she too now behaved as a mama duck (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). This reflects the former childhood experiences and the maternal role models that inspired her, it also lends credence to the assertion that women often display the role of the mother figure at work (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). The portraitist was intrigued by how often the mothers were cited in comparison to formal leaders and began to examine how her elders impacted her leadership. It is apparent that informal leaders in childhood have a great deal of influence over current leaders. Black women in the workforce are much more influenced by their mother's basic examples than leadership theories, trends and formal leadership.

Sarah continuously gives of herself, because this is what she saw the first leaders in her life doing. Black women to include, mothers, aunts, grandmothers, and women in church serve as lifelong mentors to Sarah. Sarah has found difficulty identifying a long-term formal career mentor in her organization, but continually counts on her informal mentors for support and comfort. This had led her to make mentoring others a priority. Sarah's mother is still living and the relationship with her mother continues to impact her and influence her (Fingerman, 2002).

While, she did not equate the characteristics found in her mother with leaders in her organization; she never spoke of compassion when referencing her government leaders. This was however, the number one attribute Sarah aspired to exhibit to her team. It was also, consistently identifiable by members of her team, evidenced by her climate survey results. While, she did mention a few other leaders fondly, the lessons and leadership given by them was fleeting when compared to the informal leader's direction in the earlier part of her life; Mama Duck set Sarah on a sustainable path.

Theme 2 - What Do They Call Me?

The second theme references the challenges to Sarah's identity as a Black woman leading in the federal government. Her race and gender has had some impact on her understanding of team dynamics, and occasionally she was not the first choice for a position, but it has not hindered her progression. Knowing what and who is authentic in the office environment has been a struggle identified by Sarah since she's never sure of what role her race and gender play in her treatment or acceptance. She is astute enough to know people say one thing to her face and another behind her back. When asked a question concerning other's opinion of her, she said, "I don't care how they describe me, their description of me is like...oh really, cool."

Sarah is an accomplished, seasoned leader within the federal government; despite this she referenced the lack of autonomy in her authority. She continually struggles with owning her own identity in the workplace and being an authority. She is confident in her abilities, but is silently questioned by her peers and her team. She can feel this and it shows up in her climate survey from subordinates. The comments on last year's survey range from the complimentary descriptors of Sarah as compassionate, effective, tenacious, and steadfast to the negative and visceral descriptors that describe her as ineffective, biased and recommend that she "leave". According to Heifetz and Linskey (2017), "compassion is necessary for success and survival."

The constant shifting perceptions of Sarah have forced her to forge an alliance with a harsh reality. No matter how hard she works or how much of herself she gives away, it may never be enough to satisfy those she leads. Exasperated, Sarah said, "I don't understand what these people want." This inability to successfully answer that question impacts her sense of identity; how she views her leadership is consistently challenged by how others view her

leadership. This has caused Sarah an enormous amount of heartache, but the pain has required her to focus on the things she can change.

At times, she uses nervous laughter to mask the ever-present insecurity that exists within her experience. Maya Angelou (1987) wrote about this survival apparatus for Black people to mask their pain in her poem, “The Mask.” While Sarah has earned a seat at the leadership table, it does not appear that her chair holds the same value as her White peers. Inwardly, she desires to be accepted as part of the team and this desire goes unnoticed by her peers. She sits at table, but it feels temporary and hollow as she seeks to make what she’s achieved feel valid.

Her years of service, don’t seem to lend credence to the fact that she is a woman with an enormous amount of expertise. She often lacks credibility in the eyes of her staff and her peers. The epistemic injustice Sarah faces parrots Fricker’s (2007) notion of testimonial injustice, in which someone is wronged in their capacity as giver of knowledge. Her race and gender seemingly separates her, she’s not sure in which order or if it matters as it cannot be pulled apart (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 1984). Despite her feelings, she has achieved a measure of peace and a sense of calm concerning her place in the world.

Black women have historically been handed identities and not allowed to express themselves in American society dating back to slavery. (Collins, 2000; Gaspar & Hine, 1996; Lerner, 1992). Black scholars (Collins, 2000; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; hooks, 1984) have written about the phenomenon of “intersectionality” and “double consciousness” (DuBois, 1903) broadly. While she feels underappreciated and at times misunderstood, Sarah contributes freely and collaborates with all willing to partner with her and her team. She is highly organized and sees herself as the backbone of the unit she leads.

She is capable of leading and as a matter of fact, behind closed doors she is the one people seek counsel from. She has common sense and is an excellent problem solver, with a keen insight into making people comfortable. Yet, she remains an afterthought when it comes to the high visibility projects. Her area is administrative in nature, and while it is deemed important, the bosses somehow believe anyone could potentially lead that unit. She leads in an environment where she must prove her worth continuously.

While this is frustrating, it is easily done, because she is competent. She knows her stuff; Sarah has become an expert in her chosen field. She knew, she would have to work harder, be smarter and have thick skin and she accomplished it. Some days it is hard to stomach though, if she's honest, sometimes she just wants to be seen for who she really is. Through the years, she has learned that her personal image is much more important than any portrait fabricated.

That is why her agency's climate survey is an affront to the self-talk it takes to assure herself that she is a credible leader. This survey has caused her anxiety at times, but she has drawn a line in the sand that separates her work self and her home self. People at work think they know Sarah, but they have yet to scratch the surface of her brilliance. Sarah has noticed throughout the years that she is judged or treated different than her White peers at times. There is an extension of grace given to them that Sarah has yet to experience.

Sarah works in a predominately male environment and is often the only Black face at the table. Earlier in her career, she chooses to be silent unless her opinion is sought, which was sporadic. Describing the dynamics in the leadership meetings she said intensely,

It's really hard when you're the Black person and you're in the group and you're the only Black person, but you know what you're talking about and they don't really quote want to hear what you have to say until all of a sudden they start watching the faces in the

room and they notice one face gives them this crazy look like “you got to be kidding me, uff [sic] I wouldn’t do that if I was you,” those type things you’re going through that and then they say Sarah what are your thoughts?

What Sarah is describing is her experience during the deteriorating phase of the resilience cycle, due to her feeling devalued in the team based on her race. Yet, being asked her opinion moved her to the adapting cycle where she learns to make sense of her new role and her new-found voice, and eventually Sarah moved to the recovering phase of the cycle and learned to pass her experiences on to others (Patterson & Kelleher, 2005). Her counterparts don’t have to go through this melodramatic exposure to have their opinions sought. Sarah’s description made it seem that it was a privilege to even be allowed to speak and be heard. She further clarified,

you got to know what you’re talking about, you give them what you think as it is applicable to everyone, not just one group of people and they sit back and go, huh “I hadn’t thought about it that way, but that’s a good idea and you’re sitting there like “whew”.

Sarah has struggled to know who she really is; she has become an award-winning actress, hiding her emotions to be strong. Sarah will not be seen running out of a meeting crying when someone makes an inappropriate comment concerning her or her team, Sarah has learned to adapt to her environment. She will not allow her anger to manifest even when it is righteous for fear that it will be misinterpreted. Sarah will not have the freedom to be granted forgiveness for her errors or omissions as some other team members will. No, Sarah will laugh and smile no matter how much it hurts and all of this will be considered resilience by her, this is a part of her recovery.

Sarah is emotionally intelligent. She is self-aware and masterfully decides which emotions to share at work. Sarah has been unable to control the narrative of her story, but she has mastered the art of controlling her emotions. The narrative concerning her is written for her by those outside of her experience, but she has learned to control her emotions instead. She knows when and where to explore her emotions and how they impact others views of her. She learned early in her career what was acceptable for Black women and what was not (Holder, Jackson & Ponterotto, 2015). She experienced the disbelief associated with being transparent and how it was received. She has learned to deal with her emotions in the safety of her home, community and family. Sarah is perfectly poised and capable of dealing with them at a later time rather than becoming vulnerable in the workplace.

A common archetype associated with Black women is “Big mama” or “mammy”. This image generates from the role Black women played during slavery as nurturers or caregivers (Brown, Haygood, & Mclean, 2010; White, 1999). This is the docile Black woman, who is a servant, and often depicted as an older, jovial Black woman. She is loving, and ready to wipe the tears of every child within her reach. This is the model Black women, and the only image of Black women that has been celebrated by mainstream America. Interestingly, this long held stereotype is also the only stereotype that has positive attributes associated with it. The long-held arch enemy of “Mammy” is “Jezebel,” who has long been thought of as the highly sexualized Black woman that is devoid of modesty (Brown, White-Johnson & Griffin-Fennel, 2013). These two images rob Black women of being accepted as individual human beings and are not role models that Black women aspire to emulate.

Nonetheless, these stereotypes prevail and are harmful because it does not consider the progressive nature of Black women (Brown, White-Johnson & Griffin-Fennel, 2013). Sarah has

not limited herself to the stereotypical roles, career path, and attributes held concerning Black women; she is unapologetically her own woman and leader. Sarah does not believe the climate survey is an accurate reflection of her leadership, it is a pejorative and it is yet another way that her identity is challenged or called into question. Balancing how others see her and how she sees herself is a daily choir, but she is content because she is not defined by her job. Sarah has been the victim of implicit bias in the workplace, (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2012) yet she prevails and does not consider herself a victim (Christie, 2010), but a survivor. Sarah has experienced the “roller coaster” effect predicted in the resilience cycle throughout her career and is often found in the recovering and growing stage of the cycle (Patterson & Kelleher). This is evident in her language, composure and characterization of her experiences and discrimination she has endured. She is objective and understands that her peers, leaders, and even her employees are often unaware of the bias they project upon her and her ability to effectively lead.

Theme 3 – When a Black woman asks, “How may I help you?” She means it.

Sarah’s natural leadership style closely mimics servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1970). She is more concerned with helping others than getting ahead. She frequently begins the tedious process of establishing a relationship with her co-workers to ensure she knows them well enough to effectively give them proper guidance. She sees herself as a team member, rather than an individual. She has no problem with her leadership role and responsibilities, but ultimately does not position herself above the unit, except on the organizational chart.

Sarah believes leadership is an honor, one that she does not take lightly. She knows that many other women are carefully watching her to determine how they will achieve what she has. She is a woman of integrity, who seeks not only to do “right,” but good. She is loyal to her organization and those who follow her. She willingly provides them the tools and the knowledge to reach their goals and hopes they surpass hers.

When asked about her hope for the next generation, she lovingly says “go beyond what I’ve done.” It was genuine and authentic and her words moved beautifully through the air and cut through the pretense of what most view her leadership as. Sarah’s future goals are centered on continued service, she is nearing retirement, yet she continues to pursue goals outside the federal government. Something in Sarah propels her to keep moving, keep evolving and keep serving. After all, she has used this model her entire career and it has worked. She is still standing, while others have fallen due to chasing vain desires and self-directed interests. Concerning her personal leadership philosophy, she posited,

I really believe in the team concept, a lot of the managers that I had worked under in the past did not feel the need to include others in decision making and I thought it was important to garner respect and buy in to have others to weigh in.

Hubris is not a word associated with Sarah; she is humble and even when faced with the arrogance of fellow leaders she remains true to her moral compass (Allen, 2017; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). Sarah knows there is no glory in fighting fire with fire, so she chooses her battles wisely. She is often judged harsher than her peers and with a different standard, but finds a way to learn from the experience. In the face of disparate treatment, Sarah continues to serve (Ngunjiri, 2006). Sarah serves others regardless of the treatment she receives from them; she has found a way to manage the injustices faced because they were foretold of by her mother and grandmother. Sarah anticipated the oppression she has faced and charges ahead for the sake of the community in which she leads, lives, and belongs. While Sarah is loyal to the organization, she is fiercely supportive of the individuals that make up to organization (Barnes, 2012).

Sarah is often found providing more than technical advice; she is often sought on personal matters as well. When confronted by a junior supervisor about a closed-door session held with an employee, Sarah considered it a teaching moment and stated,

You also know as part of our job as leaders and managers to you know help our people work through these issues and to be an ear when they need an ear you know somebody in the office that's not going to walk around and talk about them.

Sarah relies on self-reflection to help her make sense of her experience. She is not afraid to look herself in the mirror and accept failure, but she is unwilling to accept defeat. The woman in the mirror is beautifully complex, intriguing, and takes notice of every imperfection not to condemn herself, but to improve her capacity to follow and be followed. Self-reflection also serves as a coping strategy for Sarah, who said,

The one thing that I do is to sit and reflect, ohm it's probably the best coping mechanism that I have. What I find myself doing is just reflecting, just finding a quiet place um

sitting um in the quiet for you know for 15, 10, 15 minutes to reflect on you know the day or whatever I just went through um I find that that helps a lot and family.

Sarah's family raised her to have the heart of a servant. She watched as the other Black women in her family doted on her and others. She greatly admired her mother's willingness to keep the family together and help others in the process. Sarah's appreciation for the lessons she learned in childhood did not fully materialize until she became a leader. It was at that moment she gained an appreciation for what she had been taught by a fellow servant.

While transformational leadership is taught as a preferred method of leadership in the leadership training in Sarah's organization, she is true to her leadership preference of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 2002). This feels natural to Sarah and requires very little effort on her part, it mimics the spiritual teachings she lives by (Ngunjiri, 2006). The differences in these two leadership styles are essentially the leader's focus (Stone, Russell & Patterson, 2004). Sarah decisively balances her focus between organizational vision and those who will carry out the vision. She believes there are many ways to transform the organization and is committed to doing so, but has chosen to accomplish this by transforming those who follow her in the process (Ngunjiri, 2006).

Theme 4 – You Can’t Take It Personal

The fourth theme that emerged in the interviews was the didactic need for work/life balance. Sarah seemed to be on a soap box preaching as she spoke as if describing the separation of church and state. She was ominous in her depictions of what happens to one who does not learn to leave work and all the stress of it at the office. She has seen firsthand what happens when you are not disciplined in this area. She has worried late in the night and recounted work scenes in her mind as she lay in her bed awake.

She is careful with who she shares her woes with, often keeping them to herself. Not because she doesn’t have people she can trust, but because she doesn’t want them to solve her problems for her. Sarah is a critical thinker, who enjoys the challenge that work brings. But, she is equally motivated by the peace that her home life provides. She is no longer willing to jeopardize this as she did earlier in her career.

The warnings given by Sarah came from a voice of reason, a voice that had “been there and done that.” Sarah had at some point seen her career and work impact her home life and happiness (Lewis, 2012). In the growing stage of Sarah’s resilience, she has discovered family as an anchor and the support gained from family is the means of her moving quickly through the resilience cycle (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). She found a way to make changes to prioritize her life and now insists others do the same. Sarah said with a laugh,

Most of the time I leave work at work, I don’t take it home, I’ve done that for years now, cuz [sic] work will kill you, the job will kill you, and there’s no point of dying in that chair, it’s not worth it. The work will be there the next day and the next and the next and the next. To this the portraitist responded, “I um often tell people you know if someone breaks in here tonight, they are not going to do your work it’ll be here for you tomorrow.”

The agency's mission itself, lends to an enormous amount of stress, every leader knows this before they accept their appointment. Sarah balances the daily requirements and her life goals and the frustration that exists between the two. Sarah has gotten so frustrated at times that she considered leaving her job, but each time she found the strength to continue (Lewis, 2012). Occasionally, this was due to her treatment based on her race and gender. But, Sarah is not a quitter; she realizes that she has outside interests to balance any adversity in the workplace (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017).

Sarah's life outside of work is her own and she has found joy in it, her external partnerships provide a haven for her to escape the internal pressures she faces daily. Music has been a source of comfort for Sarah also, and during the interview she noted several songs that has brought her comfort and uplifted her during dark times (Allet, 2010; Bassoppo-Moyo, 2012). These songs evoked emotion in her and brought back a flood of memories, some of which she shared during the interview.

When she experiences struggle, she remembers the wisdom passed on to her from the other women in her life's narrative. She looks inward and to the strengths based repository of advice she's collected throughout the years and draws strength from the past. Sarah explained one of her coping strategies as such,

If I need reinforcement, then I look back on where I've been, and where I you know how I started where I been where I came from and where I'm going and I constantly I periodically look at those battle scars, but I don't wear them as a part of my life because that's just a season in my life but it doesn't dictate who I am and where I'm going.

She utilizes several tools to counter opposition in the workplace; her tool belt is stocked with everything she needs. She is prepared and when she encounters a new problem, she is quick to seek solutions to resolve it.

She is determined to not let the stress of the day impact her evening activities with those dearest to her. This too, puts Sarah at risk of further alienation from her leadership team. She is not invited to the social events that many of her male peers are. Her interests don't necessarily match those of her colleagues. Even though her faith is a fundamental contributor to the work/life balance Sarah has acquired, she does not find an appropriate mechanism to easily share this side of her at work.

This is a critical piece of Sarah's identity that shapes her leadership and her resilience. Sarah has put her career and the people she encounters in its proper place in her mind. The naysayers, skeptics, and critics don't get to ride home with her. Sarah relies on her supervisor's assessment to determine her areas of improvement. She was very animated while stating, "They don't rate me, they don't put money in my bank account, when you put money in my bank account you can talk, you don't put no money in the account, you can't say a word."

Sarah is full of humor and this has allowed her to look at the worst life has thrown at her and giggle. Empathically Sarah stated, "When I leave work, I leave work at work, I do not take work home unless it's a dire strait I need to finish." She is infinitely convinced that divine intervention rewards her efforts; she shared,

When you walk out and you get in your car and you drive off the complex and you get outside the gate, the gate closes you drive on home and sometime during the course of home, getting home and getting relaxed, eating your dinner, even preparing for bed the answer will come to you. What you need to do for that issue that occurred and of course

if you uh you say your prayers going and coming, God will give you an answer for whatever it is you need for that day or that situation.

Sarah seems to maintain an internal happiness because as she puts it, “I know that I am resilient, I’ve had a lot of obstacles in my life.” The portraitist has no doubt after spending time with Sarah, gaining her insights from the documentation provided and carefully examining her words and actions that she is resilient. Sarah has completed a metamorphosis that began with adversity and ends with endurance (Ledesma, 2009; Patterson & Kelleher, 2005; Richardson, 2002). Resilience continues to equate to survival for the Black woman, “I never knew it was not an option to be strong, the portraitist wrote in her journal.” Resilience is native to Sarah; it is a part of the very moral fiber, a type of super power that protects her from evil villains.

Sarah is older and in her case, it equates to wiser, she has figured out not only the need for work/life balance, she has attained it. Humor, faith, and humility have been critical to her ability to acquire it. She does not take herself too seriously these days after surviving years in a top role. Sarah had an intense look on her face as she asserts,

You can’t internalize all this stuff, and take it home with you every night, cuz [sic] it’ll make you crazy you know so you just have to train yourself to compartmentalize it and remember that this this is work, this is home, this is not personal.

“Work is work” was the motto tattooed on Sarah’s arm. She has built a shelter that she may retreat to after a hard day’s work. For her health and longevity, this became critical over time. Now, she tries to educate others to do the same. She, like other leaders are not in control of all external forces that exist in the workplace. The difference between Sarah and so many others is she is aware and has taken dedicated steps to mitigate the impact these forces have on her

(Lewis, 2012). Sarah now stands at the gates, rings the warning bell and attempts to teach others to seek shelter.

Theme 5 - Forgiveness is the Key to Resilience

The final major theme that emerged from the interview responses was the most surprising to the portraitist. Sarah initially described her ability to forgive numerous times during the interviews in metaphors and narrative. The portraitist requested an additional phone interview to explore this subject further, to make sense of the dissonant strains. This theme revealed itself in the patterns described by Sarah and in keeping with the portraiture method the portraitist sought to seek coherence in what appeared to be a demur theme (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997). The necessity for forgiveness was situated in Sarah's faith and it served as the underpinning of Sarah's resilience (Manning, 2013).

Sarah knows that she is not the only one who struggles. She is aware that other leaders are struggling as well to be respected by their subordinates. Sarah has an additional struggle that many of her White peers do not. Sarah's race and gender causes her to stand out from her team. It causes her to be seen differently or not at all by the executives. Sarah has had several encounters which could have resulted in her becoming bitter. She has been called disparaging terms, had her leadership undermined, and has been overlooked and disrespected. Speaking on this she quipped, "It was like everybody working around me."

Sarah described several occasions in which she was ostracized or judged harshly by those in her agency, sometimes due to her race. Knowing how much she cares for others; these actions have caused Sarah grief and pain. Sarah's action denotes that she forgave these individuals; she did not repay them or seek revenge (Davis et.al, 2015). She continued to treat them with respect

while she was being insulted. Sarah has chosen to forgive and considers forgiveness necessary (Reed, 2006; Welch, 2011). She providing the following explanation provided,

Forgiveness is my way of purifying myself from being someone that I prefer not to be – an ultra-hostile individual or someone who is bitter all the time. I prefer to be happy and free in my mind, body and soul (Ruth, personal email communication, May 24, 2017).

Sarah's willingness to forgive is once again attributed to the lessons she was taught as a child. Sarah suggests,

I was always taught to ask for forgiveness and to forgive. It's ok to remember – the why, who, instance or why something happened and why you forgave, so as not to fall to the pattern of not having learned a lesson (Ruth, personal email communication, May 24, 2017).

Of her mother she adds,

Well you know my mother is a very forgiving person and that's something I have observed in her on a personal level all my life." "She will feel sorry for someone who mistreats somebody because she feels like they don't know any better (Jenny, personal communication via phone, May 23, 2017).

Sarah is unwilling to carry the weight of grudges around. She has decided to lay her burdens down quickly by choosing to look at an issue from all perspectives (Allen, 2017). Her confidence and communication skills allow her to easily engage in confrontation and contentious discussions. When asked about her choice to forgive she replied,

Well you know it just, it helps me to keep things in perspective you know. If I'm operating from a place of forgiveness, then it's easier to be compassionate or its easier to keep in mind that it's business it's not personal (Jenny, personal communication via phone, May 23, 2017).

Sarah was motivated to forgive to protect herself from the negativity that comes with unforgiveness. She further described the reason to forgive as, “Self-preservation, you know you can’t go on and enjoy your life or your career if you are having to remember to hold on to grudges or you’re always making excuses for you know things.” She is careful to look for lessons in everything she faces and ensures, “So you know if there’s a lesson to be learned you got to take that lesson from it you know and then you just have to let it go, because it’ll wear on you professionally and you know physically.” Sarah is distinguished by a legacy of strength of the women who roamed the halls before her, many cleaning the very offices she now sits in. Her days are long and her burdens are many as she not only seeks achievements for herself, but those she can touch whether in her employ or not. She is caring to a fault, this is not known to everyone she encounters, because often she appears tough. It is her ability to rationalize, reflect, and remember that she is forgiven that helps her to forgive others.

Speaking of a former supervisor, Sarah believes,

The things that motivate people it’s not necessarily malicious, for him I just think he needed more leadership training. So, rather than get mad at him and call him a bigot and call him all this other stuff you know I just put it in the right frame of mind so, it keeps me coming from a professional place you know when I’m dealing with stuff like that (Jenny, personal communication via phone, May 23, 2017).

Sarah noted that her supervisory position has opened her eyes to better understand employees.

She shared,

I didn’t understand it for the longest time until I became a supervisor and started realizing sometimes what motivates people to behave a certain way has nothing to do with me. You know with my employees like with the climate survey a lot of times it’s the

employees who are struggling with the work who are lashing out (Jenny, personal communication via phone, May 18, 2017).

This research has proven that Sarah encountered adversity during her federal career as predicted by the research conducted by other professionals, it also supported that she plowed through it (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003) and thrived (Patterson & Kelleher, 2005). What was not clear from previous research is that forgiveness would be a key component in Sarah's ability to survive adversity. Sarah's faith is once again requited by forgiving those she considers enemies (Davis et.al, 2015; Manning, 2013). Sarah offers,

The God I serve loves all and with his mercy that he bestowed upon me as he forgives me each day for the crazy stuff that I do, why can't I forgive others? Thus, if God can forgive, why can't I? (Ruth, personal email communication, May 24, 2017).

Sarah feels that her forgiveness provides an opportunity to model it for others. Not only will she potentially benefit from it, but others may tangentially. She has forgiven many people in her life and expressed, "I blame her for nothing, but forgive her for everything, when speaking of someone she recently forgave. Sarah has come to terms with what forgiveness looks like to her and explained,

I'm not forgiving the actions, I'm not forgiving what I feel was a slight against me, I'm forgiving you so I can move on with my life because the more I stay mired and mad with this situation the more it detracts from me improving in different situations in my life (Iyanla, personal communication via phone, May 31, 2017).

She pursues forgiveness in most situations and acknowledged that it comes to her easily, but not necessarily naturally. Even in her choice to forgive she is thinking of loved ones and provides the reason to forgive is in order not to negatively impact the people in her life that matter most. Sarah takes time to identify the hurt and pain and work through it, she postulated,

I know that if I continue to be ah you know to feel this hurt and this pain, it manifests in those relationships and I think that it's unfair for me to project what was done to me or against me onto them and I might not even realize that I'm doing it. You know sometimes it will show up. I don't want my feelings to show up in our relationship, um so that's how come forgiveness uh is important to me (Iyanla, personal communication via phone, May 31, 2017).

Being unwilling to allow anything to interfere with her valued relationships is yet again another trademark of her resilience. Sarah rates interpersonal relationships high and has determined that forgiveness is necessary to keep them intact. She has matured enough to recognize the emotions she feels and is willing to deal with them swiftly, even to the point of sacrificing them.

While Sarah believes forgiveness is the right thing to do, she is keenly aware of the benefits derived from it (Davis et.al, 2015; Welch, 2011). The ability to forgive aids Sarah to move through the resilience cycle; after adversity hits, she begins the work of forgiving the offenses which aids her in the adapting and recovering phases and propels her in the direction of the growth phase (Patterson & Kelleher, 2005). Sarah is not alone in this assertion, researchers also suggest that spirituality is a pathway to resilience (Manning, 2013).



Figure 5: Thematic Analysis

Footprints in the Sand – Advice for Aspiring Black Women Leaders

One of the interview questions posed to the women in this study was, “what advice do you have for aspiring Black women leaders in the federal government?” Their answers can be described in the following three themes: (a) believe in yourself; (b) seek leadership opportunities; and (c) create a network. Ruth elicited the image of footprints in the sand during her interview. She used this imagery to describe the Black women who potentially follow in her generation’s footsteps.

“There are some who want to follow in your steps, but they know your steps are a little deeper; they’re not as shallow um as they used to be in yesteryear,” Ruth explained. Every leader’s footprints are different, according to Ruth, she emboldens the younger generation of Black women to consider gathering their wisdom now. “But as the sand continues to wash, continues to wash away a little of that print, so you got to get to the point before it’s totally washed away,” she added.

While Ruth is willing to share her knowledge, she sees that younger Black women and Millennials in general are not as accepting as she once was. She sees that they want to get to where she is, yet they question the counsel she gives much more than she ever did (Fricker, 2007). She also noted that they want the information provided to them instead of putting the effort in to discover it themselves. Ruth refers to the youngest generation in the federal workforce as “M-babies.” Ruth anticipates the change in government as, “it looks like government is switching to business corporate and with the switch to business corporate becomes new challenges.” She felt this would require the next generation to figure it out.

Believe in Yourself

Every woman in this study had some variation detailing the importance of believing in one’s self. Each describes the need for self-confidence and the requirement to obtain it by any means necessary. Jenny states, “Start looking in areas that you may not have considered, and consider them, why not?” Look for areas that...why not, you?” This was one of the ways Jenny capitalized upon her success in her agency. She believed in her abilities and sought diverse assignments, because she knew the common denominator in her career was her perseverance. Iyanla mentor’s Black women and says she sees so many Black women who do not believe in themselves enough.

“There’s always some problem or somebody who told them they can’t,” she relented. “They have to be willing to strip themselves bare and find the reason why they are, um preventing themselves from reaching their goal.” She purported, “develop thick skin and never allow people to dictate to you what their success looks like, create your own image and don’t be afraid to use your voice.” Stripping yourself bare is excellent advice, but difficult to do. This requires vulnerability, and often, Black women feel like they are on the defensive in the federal

workplace. At least this is how I felt. I always believed in myself, which led me to great success. However, often it appeared as if I was the only one who believed in my knowledge, abilities, value and plans.

After serving in a leadership position, Ruth began to see a pattern in her employees and began to take steps to help them believe in themselves. Ruth requires, “sometimes you got to revert and get out of your mold and go into something else, to have other folks say, I can do this too.” After taking on a new Secretary position, Ruth was given a stern warning by another senior Black woman, “Don’t ever let them get on your nerves to the extent that you forget who you are.”

The theme of believing in yourself is a common, widely known piece of advice, it is what nearly every child is told by their mother (Brown & McClean, 2010; Holder, Jackson & Ponterotto, 2015). For Black women, this is often a difficult task when challenged by stereotypes, lack of mentors, and solo status. Ruth, Jenny and Iyanla often found themselves in a situation that required them to count on their past successes to continue believing they can achieve future ones as well. Their resilience allowed them to continue to believe that victory was possible and within their reach.

Seek Leadership Opportunities

None of the women in this study sought out their first leadership opportunity. Each of them was pointed in that direction by a bystander. Volunteerism was noted as a means of giving employees exposure to leadership at various points in your career, by Iyanla. She urges Black women to set out to be leaders and to relentlessly pursue it. “Not just leadership roles, but by roles that are predominately owned by White males, she suggests.”

Thinking back on her journey she says, “I didn’t set out to be a leader, but circumstances put me there.” Every woman in this study described a situation in which they suggested other Black women consider a leadership position. This was typically done as they were vacating their position, yet each woman they suggested this to, responded with naivety and surprise. Jenny recalled saying to a young woman, who she characterizes as being smart and who could have applied for her upcoming vacancy, “You could really do this job, why would you not consider doing this job?” The woman had no legitimate answer, but in that moment Jenny realized she too, was this woman years prior. “Then I realized, you know Margaret had cultivated me, I was in the same boat, I was thinking the same, I hadn’t even considered management,” Jenny says to her chagrin. More recently, Jenny in her senior leadership position is empowered to set up future leaders. She works to create projects and assignments where employees may gain this critical skill. She assesses her employees and selects them for peer roles, which have team lead duties. This often gives them their first leadership exposure.

Ruth wants other Black women to stop limiting themselves as they choose their leadership positions. She notes that currently there are very few Black women who hold her position. She knows that other Black women look at her and how she got to her position, but wants them to know they don’t have to use her roadmap to be successful. Sarcastically, she says, “Some people might say I don’t want to go down south, then go out west.”

Ruth realizes that every person is different and that leadership can be attained in a variety of ways. All those ways begin with the first leadership step; this is where Ruth has turned her attention. She has created an environment by which, employees not only see leadership emanating from her, but they are expected to chase after it. Iyanla, Jenny, and Ruth are all

willing to share anything they can with those seeking to grow in this area. This is demonstrated by their transparency and openness in this research.

None of the women had a definitive answer to explain the limited number of Black women in leadership. Ruth recalled that at one time there were 13 Black women who held her position, but now the number has been cut in half. She proposed that it is possible that Black women don't want the headaches of leadership. Whether this assertion is true or not, it is accurate to say based upon this research that leadership needs to be endorsed by someone else before it is considered a viable option. The endorsement can be that of a hard sell or a soft sell, but leaders targeting Black women need to consider the approach they take in recruiting future Black women leaders.

Create a Network

The need for a support infrastructure was resonate of the collective wisdom of the women in this study, despite their efforts to amass one early in their career. When Iyanla suggested this, it was in the form of regret, one of the things she struggled to find in her career. She said assuredly, "I would like to see the older women reach out to the younger women and be like a mentor figure or you know um a person who is imparting their knowledge, wisdom into the incoming folks." Indeed, Iyanla says the counterpart to believing in themselves is having a strong mentor. She described the mentor as, "Someone they can rely on to be honest with them, every step of the way."

Since her position was unique in nature she often felt that she was on an island. Iyanla recommends Toast masters and groups with likeminded goals as possible sources to start a network. Ruth suggests the network include more than people, it should include knowledge. She

spoke about gathering this knowledge by following directions, reading, and researching. This advice has been met with opposition from some of the younger generation.

Ruth is firm in her assertion, “There might be something in the reading that will benefit you more than me telling you.” This lesson was reinforced from a high school teacher who provided an assignment to show the benefits of reading instructions first. Ruth considered it a trick question, but she was only one of two students to get the right answer, because she read the instructions. The instructions were simply, sign your name and put down your pencil.

This comprehension based lesson stuck with Ruth and she continues to pass it along. Ruth considers that every person in your network is a resource that should be drawn upon, “your resources are ones who have gone through it or about to go through it.” In our organization, there is an already established community network for those who hold our position, yet the Black men and women in this position also have an informal established network. This network is one in which we can freely share our experience through the context and filter of race, which is often not understood or shared by our White peers. I have greatly benefited from both networks, but found my Black peers a necessity when I was struggling with racial issues in the workplace. This network allowed me to share honestly and openly without fear of reprisal. These types of networks are highly recommended as potential networks are developed (Holder, Jackson & Ponterotto, 2015).

Jenny defines herself as personable and touts, “you have to build relationships with people to do a good job as a leader.” She has been highly successful in establishing networks with leaders above her. This has allowed her to find strength as she focused on the mission and balanced how they view her leadership comparable to how her staff views her. Iyanla, Jenny and Ruth suggested networks should be created in different ways and with different populations in

one's career for future success. Iyanla spoke of personal networks to include mentors, external agencies, to include the church. Jenny spoke of individual people and teams, and Ruth spoke of networks as personal knowledge partnerships and in familial terms, such as a village.

Whatever one uses to define the terms of a network, one thing is clear they are highly encouraged for aspiring leaders (Carlton, Smith, Baskerville-Watkins, & Carven, n.d.). Leadership is not a solo event, it is a team sport. Interestingly, each of the women in this study to include the portraitist has the honor of being the first Black woman to hold this position in their office. Knowing all too well, that our accomplishments are vital to the next generation of Black women leaders, we are careful with our leadership opportunities and don't squander the honor. We are taking copious notes and becoming astute leadership students to pass our collective wisdom and the leadership baton to those who follow behind us.

Black women's leadership advice can be considered as a bright, optimistic perspective colored against a backdrop of dark hues. Confidence laden self-talk is recommended as a potential gateway into achieving one's goals. It is recommended that Black women should consider becoming connoisseurs of leadership assignments and tasks. Lastly, operating in a vacuum is determined as futile by the senior leaders who provided their recipe for success in the federal government. While Black women aspiring to leadership have left footprints in the sand to guide them, they apparently, also have a shore lined with the Black women who came before them cheering them on.

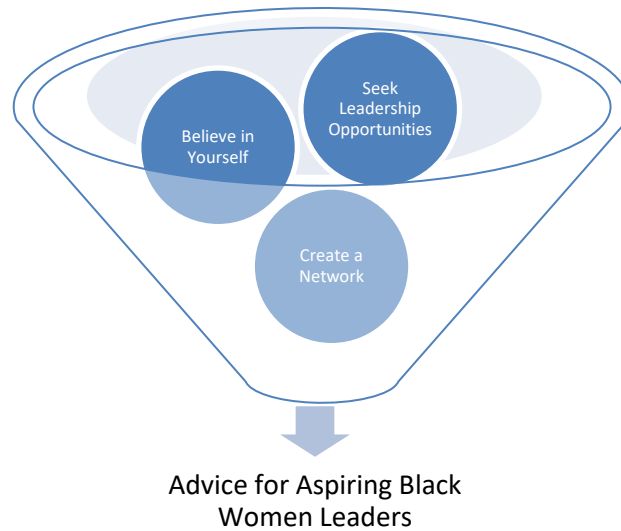


Figure 6. Advice for Aspiring Black Women Leaders

Recommendation for Future Research

This study adds to the body of research that exists concerning leadership experiences of Black Women leaders in the U. S. Federal Government and Black Women's stories of resilience. Using the portraiture methodology, this research study illustrated their work experiences and the challenges they experienced leading. This research sought to extract the strategies they used to overcome occupational adversity encountered. These women's stories provided a foundation upon which other researchers could build upon to discover and create other Black women leader's portraits. Future researchers could expand upon this research in limitless ways concerning race and gender using the journal assignments to paint additional portraits of leaders. Since this study focused solely on Black women in the U.S. Federal government, another qualitative portraiture study concerning Black women in academia, non-profit and corporate entities would be beneficial for other women who aspire to lead people in those areas.

Studies with an emphasis on Black women working for foreign governments could provide a greater understanding of the differences existing between Black women in America

and those working abroad. This research could also be applied to other women of color such as Asian, Latina, and Native American whose voices are also not commonly addressed in leadership research. This research has the potential to improve diversity and inclusion efforts in the workforce by adding to the current body of literature concerning leadership, inclusion, and resilience. Further study into skin color and the impact it has on Black women would provide another lens to view Black women leader's stories through. While language was also a barrier at times, skin color was noted as a personal and professional barrier in this study to acceptance within teams. Race alone, did not prevent Black women from achieving senior level positions, but impacted how they are inculcated and accepted in the work environment.

Exploring the value of forgiveness in leadership is another area of exploration that can provide unique insights into the resilience of Black women leaders. Determining if this value helps Black women advance in the workplace can be useful to aspiring Black women leaders. It is my hope that the federal government will strategically design career-mentoring programs that people of color may benefit from. Clearly, the results of this dissertation suggest that Black women have few if any formal mentors in federal agencies, this should immediately be addressed. Diversity and Inclusion programs should focus on the disparity that exists between the number of Black women who work for the federal government and the numbers that rise to the senior executive service. The federal government has a responsibility to educate Black women, prepare them for the unconscious bias that exists in the workplace, and acknowledge the potential impact it may have on them.

Understanding the experiences of Black women in the federal government should be a priority and a careful examination of the exclusion of Black women from current leadership theory and trainings should be done to determine if they have a negative impact upon Black

women (Parker & Ogilvie, 1996). Based on the experiences of the Black women in this study, an analysis of the annual climate survey needs to be conducted to determine if Black women's ratings are impacted by their race in accordance with the findings of other researchers that suggest Black women are judged harsher than their peers even when business is good (Rosette & Livingston, 2012). Researching the application of the servant leadership model in Black women leaders is another potential area of research to explore what leadership models are most often emulated by Black women will provide a greater insight into how to train future Black women leaders. Lastly, extrapolating the strategies used to overcome barriers in the federal government by the women in this study may prove useful to the next generation of Black women or women in general seeking leadership positions; greater validation and study in this area from future researchers is necessary for generalization.

Portraitist's Reflection

This research was designed to explore the lived experiences of Black women leaders in the U.S. federal government. Each of the Black women were senior managers who led teams that included supervisors who led others. The significance of this study originated from literature that supported the notion that African American women continue to face discrimination in the U.S. government and are underrepresented in the senior leadership ranks. (Parker & Ogilvie, 1996; U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2012). The objective was to better understand these women's experiences and document their stories to add to the limited literature existing concerning Black women's leadership to inspire the next generation of women leaders.

I previously spent time with two of these women at conferences, meetings, and gatherings over the past six years, but missed the richness of their experiences and their sage wisdom. If not for this research, I would have left their presence never hearing their stories or

understanding their lived experiences. I didn't realize how much their stories would impact me and change the way I processed adversity and forgiveness. Hearing these women's resilience stories required me to examine my own. While my encounters were like theirs, I realized I was not nearly as confident in myself as they were. I don't have the years of leadership that these women do and maybe therefore I find their strength laudable. I question if this comes in time, numbers of obstacles faced or a higher level of resilience than I currently possess. The resilience embodied in the participants differs from mine, because on some level I deeply care about the inaccurate perceptions of me.

Both Ruth and Iyanla emphatically denied that people's perceptions concerning them were an issue. They are firm in their abilities, skills, leadership, and faith. Jenny found it hard to accept the views that others held concerning her also. I understood her concern with having to digest the negative perceptions of one's leadership and deal with the emotional turmoil and pain caused by it. I shared her embarrassment knowing others would read the comments written about her and potentially judge her or worse hinder her career progression because of it.

As a researcher, I could not deny my experience of being a Black woman in the same work role as these women and how that experience has shaped my leadership and my curiosity concerning my research topic. Reflecting on my past became a central part of my impressionistic journal as I processed the story of these women in this portraiture study. The Black women I interviewed have leadership stories that are full of resilience. One of the reasons I selected resilience theory as the theoretical framework is due the assumptions I have heard my entire life concerning Black women's capability to overcome adversity due to their inner strength. I am not asserting that Black women are innately stronger than other women are, but I do believe that Black women in the U.S. have endured centuries of systemic injustices that have resulted in

Black women becoming stronger and anticipating adversity which has led them to encourage resiliency in their sons and daughters.

As I reflect upon the many assumptions that exist concerning Black women, I am reminded of a job interview in which a White Male Army Colonel asked me, “Do you think you have been discriminated against more because of your race or your gender? While I was shocked at his question, my answer was simply, “I don’t have the option of separating the two and in my experience, I have found that people, who disrespect one, typically don’t respect the other.” I have no ability to experience life outside of being a Black woman, yet I am much more than my color and gender, which God granted me.

That Colonel was very upfront with me as he offered me the position. He shared that I would face adversity in the position and potentially discrimination as he sent me into geographical areas where no one would look like me and he wanted to be sure I was up to the challenge. He had no illusions of grandeur that he would change people’s hearts, nor do I believe he was interested in trying to. He simply told me to prepare for the unfair conditions that I was about to encounter and expected that I would be resilient.

My hope is that Black women will embrace their uniqueness in every aspect and not be limited to the stereotypes that exist concerning them. I don’t want another Black woman to second guess her decisions, or deny her inner voice due to listening to her colleagues who have no experience with her struggle, her genius, or her way of leading. I want Black women leaders to know that it is possible that everything they need to be an effective leader was taught to them by their grandmothers or mothers, and they don’t have to feel insecure about that. One day, I want to look across the leadership table and see people of every color. Concerning my journey, sadly I was one of one senior leaders in the leadership meetings and seemingly had to justify my

presence to every new team member, yet those experiences taught me a great deal and are a vital part of my resilience story.

Multiple generations of Black women are honored in these portraits because they are etched on the canvas since each woman interviewed referenced other Black women as sources of inspiration. No one Black woman stood alone in these portraits, and I hope this encourages Black women to continue to mentor, coach, train and assist other women. This can be best visually experienced with the final art piece used in this dissertation, which is an original ceramic combination piece created by 17-year old aspiring Black female artist, Summer J. Her piece entitled, *Freedom* (2017) (figure 7) is a combination of three different vase forms connected to look like one. The word “freedom” is carved on the front to symbolize how she feels when creating art.



Figure 7. *Freedom* by Summer J, (2017)

Beginning with a lump of clay, the ceramicist carefully threw three individual art pieces and connected them until you could not define where one stopped and the other began. This is representative of what I did with the Sarah character in this portrait and expresses the academic

and creative freedom I felt while carving out the stories and themes found therein. The artist chose to paint this piece with three different colors of underglaze, by selecting colors that she felt were soothing. Summer purposely decided to make this piece appear flawed using a chalky underglaze in which she felt was representative of how Black women's freedom is flawed. Summer shared that as a young Black woman she feels that society expects her to cover up; she feels that her freedom is not perfect in any sense, and articulated that it feels gritty.

The texture of this clay piece (figure 7) reminded me of the rough parts of Black women's leadership stories and the shape of the vase reaffirmed that these are women's stories being crafted. I was struck by how seamless the piece appeared, as I was not aware it was a rendering of a collection of pots, and mistook it for an individual vase. This made this piece appropriate for this study, because each Black woman allegorically described themselves as a collective pot made up of individual clay vases in the form of other Black women such as their mothers, grandmothers, and women who cheered them on. I consider myself, merely one more pot that was added onto an already existing form; I know that I stand on the shoulders of the women who came before me. The word "freedom" is fitting to denote the emotions that I have borne as I engaged with Ruth, Iyanla and Jenny. This art piece was the most personal to the portraitist since the artist is the portraitist's daughter and because it was a combination piece.

This process was cathartic and each of these women freed me from the guilt of what I deemed as my past leadership failures. I was also released from the shame I felt for not having my leadership deemed acceptable and this research has given me a fresh perspective as I embark upon my new federal position. The fact that I am a Black woman leading in the federal government has not changed, but I have changed during this process. The way in which, I deal with adversity is better defined and the way I view my leadership is more graceful and socially

inclusive. Drawing strength from the women in these portraits, I have learned how to move quicker through the resilience cycle as defined by Patterson and Kelleher (2005), by understanding that many before me faced greater adversity and held their heads high.

Painting this portrait allowed me to better recognize the diversity that exists amongst Black women and their leadership styles. It provided me with an in-depth look at three very successful and remarkable Black women who happen to be leaders in the federal government. It also provided me a front row seat to their triumph and tragedies. The results from this dissertation and my journey acquiring them can be characterized in the below original poem written by the portraitist and entitled, “The New Resistance”:

Black Girl, Black Woman
 What do you see?
 Sifting through the rubble, the ash
 I see one who looks vaguely like me
 I see potential, rainbows
 A future no one knows

A story not written and a story that's never been told
 To the grave, it goes
 Unless one dares to ask
 About me?
 I have so much to say
 Never thought you'd ask
 Forget about your past, girl
 The Future is within your grasp
 Legacy.... starts with me

Black Girl, Black Woman
 What do you see?
 I see a Black Girl smiling
 She looks just like me!
 Photo hanging in the hall
 Blessing the former white walls
 Her back is strong and shoulders are tall

Resilience is the new resistance...

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Appendix A

Initial Participant Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Note: The following questions are examples of the questions that will be discussed during the interviews. It is anticipated that the questions may change during the interview based on how the participant answers. Prior to the interview, participants will be thanked for their involvement and told about the study, given an opportunity to ask any questions and asked permission to record the interview.

Black Women Leaders

Research suggest that Black women face obstacles in federal leadership and are often subjected to stereotypes and unfair bias....despite the statistics Black women continue to pursue and achieve leadership positions in the federal government. The following questions are designed to better understand your “individual” leadership story.

1. What or who influenced your quest in obtaining a leadership position?
2. Tell me a little about the first Black woman you ever identified as a leader. How did she influence your leadership? (RQ1)
3. What impact if any has your race and/or gender had on your ability to lead in the federal government? (RQ 1, 2)
4. As a Black woman what unique challenges do you face in your leadership role in the federal government? (RQ 1)
5. What perceived institutional barriers contribute to the under-representation of Black women in senior leadership in the federal government? (RQ 2)
6. How have the perceived barriers impacted your success or leadership experience? (RQ 2)
7. What strategies have you used to overcome perceived challenges while leading in the federal government? (RQ 3)
8. Have you ever gotten to the point where you considered resigning due to some of the issues you face as a Black woman? If so, why did you decide to stay? (RQ 1,2,3)
9. From what sources do you draw strength? What coping strategies do you utilize in your position? (RQ3)
10. Would you describe yourself as resilient? If so, please provide an example? Would others describe you as resilient? (RQ3)
11. What advice do you have for aspiring Black women leaders in the federal government? (RQ 3)

Interview Questions concerning journal assignments and document review items

Journal assignment #1: Shero – What characteristics do you have in common with this character?

What do you admire most about this character?

Journal assignment #2: Nina Simone song –

What character did you most identify with?

Why?

Journal assignment #3: Two images –

Describe the self- image you selected
 Why did you select it?
 How does it describe you?

Describe the second image you selected
 Why did you select it?
 How accurate is the perception of you?
 How does it make you feel to know you are perceived this way?

Journal assignment #4: Poetry –

Which poem did you select to most accurately describe you or your leadership experience?
 What made it stand out for you?

If you wrote an original poem? How does it depict your leadership or lived experience?

Climate Survey questions?

Is this an accurate perception of how you view your leadership?
 If not, how does it differ?
 What impact has race and/or gender had on how subordinates and peers view you and perceive you?
 How have you been able to overcome the perception or how have you coped with this perception?

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Form-Old Dominion University

When I see my face: Painting the Portrait of Black Women Leaders in the Federal Government.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the research study conducted by Antoinette Allen, a doctoral student in the School of Education at Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA. This study is supervised by Drs. Melva Grant and Phillip Reed. This study involves the lived experiences of Black women leaders in the federal government, which is part of Ms. Antoinette Allen's dissertation. You are being asked to participate in this study because the two of you are acquainted through work or because you have been referred to the researcher because of your position as a potential candidate to participate in this study.

The study involves an in-depth face-to-face interview, to be arranged at your convenience and preferably outside of our workplace, but in a location, you choose. Prior to the interview you will be asked to respond to four interesting and creative journal prompts that should not be overly cumbersome; however, you may opt to not complete either without any negative consequence. The interview will last approximately 90 - 120 minutes. The journal prompts will be provided to you XX timeframe prior to the initial interview. There may follow up questions after the initial interview for clarifying your responses or to get additional input through additional questions that emerged after reflection after your initial interview. Again, if you are willing, arrangements will be made to accommodate your schedule and venue (i.e., face-to-face, phone, Skype or other virtual option). Finally, you are asked to provide copies of two documents: (a) a current organizational chart detailing your leadership structure from your rating official through your subordinates; and (b) your most recent climate survey.

The information you provide will be kept strictly confidential. The informed consent forms and other identifying information will be kept separate from the data. All materials will be kept at the home office of the researcher as listed below in a password protected laptop and a locked file cabinet. The interview results and transcripts will be read and reviewed only by the Researcher, Dissertation Chair and potentially a confidential Research Assistant, who has signed the attached Professional Assistance Confidentiality Agreement. Any records that would identify you as a participant in this study, such as informed consent forms, will be destroyed by Antoinette Allen (researcher) approximately three (3) years after the study is completed.

The individual results of this study will not be disclosed or shared with your employer.

The results of this research will be published in Ms. Allen's dissertation, and perhaps conference or scholarly publications, including journals or books. However, no identifying information will be included that can be traced specifically to you. However, your identity will be protected through use of a pseudonym. If a direct quote has even remote identifying characteristics, it will be altered carefully as to not change your voice or meaning while maintaining your anonymity. You will select your pseudonym via the first journal activity, which among other things, asks you to identify your "shero". Your pseudonym does not guarantee anonymity, but we will also not reveal the agency where you are employed to further ensure that your identity remains unknown, especially given the limited size of the subject population. Additionally, you will be afforded an opportunity to discuss this study with other federal women leaders, as the results will be presented to the group of participants. The risks to you are

considered minimal; you may experience some emotional discomfort during or after your participation if you opt to share painful experiences. However, what you share is ultimately your choice.

****You may not disclose any EEO matters in any narrative discussion without the prior approval of your agencies EEO office. ****

Your Rights:

You may withdraw from this study at any time, either during or after your participation, without negative consequences. Should you withdraw, your data will be eliminated from the study and will be destroyed. No compensation is provided for participation. You will be provided a summary of the final results of this study.

If you have any questions about any aspect of this study or your involvement, please tell Antoinette Allen (researcher) before signing the form. You may also contact the supervising faculty if you have questions or concerns regarding participating in this study. The supervising faculty contact information is below.

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact Jeffrey Marshall, Senior Research Compliance Coordinator, at 683-5451 or jrmarsha@odu.edu, or Dr. Adam Rubenstein, Assistant Vice President for Research Compliance, at 757-683-3686 orarubens@odu.edu.

Two copies of this informed consent form have been provided. Please sign both, indicating you have read, understood, and agree to participate in this research. Return one to the researcher and keep the other for your files. The Institutional Review Board of Old Dominion University retains the right to access the signed informed consent forms and other study documents.

Title of Project: When I see my Face: Painting the Portrait of Black Women Leaders in the Federal Government. Student Investigator: Antoinette Allen, P.O. Box 24862, Henrico, VA 23228, aalle038@odu.edu.

Faculty Advisors: Old Dominion University, 4301 Hampton Blvd, Education Building, NORFOLK, VA 23529, Co-Chairs Dr. Melva Grant, 757-683-5725 mgrant@odu.edu and Dr. Phillip Reed, 757-683-4576 preed@odu.edu.

Participant Signature

Date

I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.

APPENDIX C

Recruitment Email

Greetings! I am Antoinette Allen, a fellow senior leader and I am a Doctoral student as Old Dominion University located in Norfolk, Virginia. I am currently pursuing a degree in Education with an emphasis in Occupational and Technical Studies. The purpose of my email is to request your participation in my dissertation research exploring the lived experiences of Black women leaders in the federal government. I am conducting qualitative research using a method known as “portraiture”. Portraiture allows the researcher to paint pictures of the participants using your words, while integrating poetry, art, and music.

This research will better help articulate the Black woman’s experience in leading teams in the federal government. Based on your position as senior manager, your experiences and leadership story can prove useful for those aspiring to hold leadership positions. Currently, you hold a senior leadership position in the federal government and I believe your story should be recorded and shared. If you agree to participate in this study, accompanying this email is a formal letter of Informed Consent requesting your assistance. Again, your participation is strictly voluntary.

I have received approval from our agency and Old Dominion University to conduct this research. I look forward to gathering your experiences and better understanding how you overcame any challenges, you faced in leadership in the federal government. Thank you for your attention and response regarding this request. If you agree, I will forward you the journal assignments and answer any questions at that time. Please advise of your interest to participate by _____.

Respectfully,

Antoinette Allen

APPENDIX D

JOURNAL ASSIGNMENTS

Thank you for your willingness to participate in the research study entitled “When I see my face: Painting the Portrait of Black Women Leaders in the Federal Government.” You have chosen to participate in a study that will not only benefit current Black women leading in the federal government, but has the potential to influence future generations of leaders. The following journal assignments are provided to elicit “thought provoking “responses. Your responses will be used to attempt to paint an accurate picture of you, based on the descriptions you provide. Please complete the four journal assignments below and return them no later than _____.

JOURNAL ASSIGNMENTS

1. Select your “shero” and explain why you identify with her. What characteristics do you have in common?
2. Please listen to the classic song “Four Women” by Nina Simone.

Which character in the song “Four Women” evokes the most feeling from you as a Black woman and describe in detail why.
3. Select or create two images that visually articulate who you are as a leader. This can be a photograph, an original drawing, an art piece or an image out of a magazine. The first image should be a self-image (how you see yourself) and the second image is how you perceive others view you. Compare and contrast the images and your feelings towards this in your journal.
4. From the provided list of poems and prose below, please select the poem that resonates with you the most based on your life experience and explain why. If none of them does, then write an original poem to describe your leadership journey or provide one that does.

Maya Angelou – Phenomenal Woman or Still I rise
 Frances Harper – The Slave Mother
 Langston Hughes – Life for me ain’t been no crystal stair
 Sojourner Truth - Ain’t I a woman speech

Four Women

Nina Simone

My skin is black
My arms are long
My hair is woolly
My back is strong
Strong enough to take the pain
Inflicted again and again
What do they call me?
My name is Aunt Sarah
My name is Aunt Sarah
Aunt Sarah

My skin is yellow
My hair is long
Between two worlds
I do belong
But my father was rich and white
He forced my mother late one night
And what do they call me?
My name is Saffronia
My name is Saffronia

My skin is tan
My hair is fine
My hips invite you
My mouth like wine
Whose little girl am I?
Anyone who has money to buy
What do they call me?
My name is Sweet Thing
My name is Sweet Thing

My skin is brown
My manner is tough
I'll kill the first mother I see!
My life has been rough
I'm awfully bitter these days
Because my parents were slaves
What do they call me?
My name is Peaches!

Phenomenal Woman
Maya Angelou

Pretty women wonder where my secret lies.
I'm not cute or built to suit a fashion model's size
But when I start to tell them,
They think I'm telling lies.
I say,
It's in the reach of my arms
The span of my hips,
The stride of my step,
The curl of my lips.
I'm a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.

I walk into a room
Just as cool as you please,
And to a man,
The fellows stand or
Fall down on their knees.
Then they swarm around me,
A hive of honey bees.
I say,
It's the fire in my eyes,
And the flash of my teeth,
The swing in my waist,
And the joy in my feet.
I'm a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.

Men themselves have wondered
What they see in me.
They try so much
But they can't touch
My inner mystery.
When I try to show them
They say they still can't see.
I say,
It's in the arch of my back,
The sun of my smile,
The ride of my breasts,
The grace of my style.

I'm a woman

Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.

Now you understand
Just why my head's not bowed.
I don't shout or jump about
Or have to talk real loud.
When you see me passing
It ought to make you proud.
I say,
It's in the click of my heels,
The bend of my hair,
the palm of my hand,
The need of my care,
'Cause I'm a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.

Still I Rise
Maya Angelou

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may tread me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops.
Weakened by my soulful cries.

Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don't you take it awful hard
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
Diggin' in my own back yard.

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?
Does it come as a surprise
That I dance like I've got diamonds
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.
Leaving behind nights of terror and fear

I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise.

The Slave Mother

By Frances Ellen Watkins Harper

Heard you that shriek? It rose
So wildly on the air,
It seem'd as if a burden'd heart
Was breaking in despair.

Saw you those hands so sadly clasped—
The bowed and feeble head—
The shuddering of that fragile form—
That look of grief and dread?

Saw you the sad, imploring eye?
Its every glance was pain,
As if a storm of agony
Were sweeping through the brain.

She is a mother pale with fear,
Her boy clings to her side,
And in her kirtle vainly tries
His trembling form to hide.

He is not hers, although she bore
For him a mother's pains;
He is not hers, although her blood
Is coursing through his veins!

He is not hers, for cruel hands
May rudely tear apart
The only wreath of household love
That binds her breaking heart.

His love has been a joyous light
That o'er her pathway smiled,
A fountain gushing ever new,
Amid life's desert wild.

His lightest word has been a tone
Of music round her heart,
Their lives a streamlet blent in one—
Oh, Father! must they part?

They tear him from her circling arms,
Her last and fond embrace.

Oh! never more may her sad eyes
Gaze on his mournful face.

No marvel, then, these bitter shrieks
Disturb the listening air:
She is a mother, and her heart
Is breaking in despair.

Mother to Son

Langston Hughes

Well, son, I'll tell you:
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
It's had tacks in it,
And splinters,
And boards torn up,
And places with no carpet on the floor --
Bare.
But all the time
I'se been a-climbin' on,
And reachin' landin's,
And turnin' corners,
And sometimes goin' in the dark
Where there ain't been no light.
So boy, don't you turn back.
Don't you set down on the steps
'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.
Don't you fall now --
For I'se still goin', honey,
I'se still climbin',
And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

AIN'T I A WOMAN?

by Sojourner Truth

Delivered 1851 at the Women's Convention in Akron, Ohio

Well, children, where there is so much racket there must be something out of kilter. I think that 'twixt the negroes of the South and the women at the North, all talking about rights, the white men will be in a fix pretty soon. But what's all this here talking about?

That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man - when I could get it - and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?

Then they talk about this thing in the head; what's this they call it? [member of audience whispers, "intellect"] That's it, honey. What's that got to do with women's rights or negroes' rights? If my cup won't hold but a pint, and yours holds a quart, wouldn't you be mean not to let me have my little half measure full?

Then that little man in black there, he says women can't have as much rights as men, 'cause Christ wasn't a woman! Where did your Christ come from? Where did your Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothing to do with Him.

If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone, these women together ought to be able to turn it back, and get it right side up again! And now they is asking to do it, the men better let them.

Obliged to you for hearing me, and now old Sojourner ain't got nothing more to say.

APPENDIX E

Letters of Permission

RE: Request for artist permission to use Freedom ceramic piece

From: Summer J
Sent: Thursday, June 08, 2017 10:02 PM
To: Allen, Antoinette L.
Subject: Re: Request to use Freedom piece

Yes , you have permission

Sent from my iPhone

On May 30, 2017, at 11:21 PM, Allen, Antoinette L. < wrote:

Greetings,

I am requesting to use a picture and description of your "freedom" clay piece in my dissertation. I am researching Black women's resilience in the federal government and feel your piece is representative of some elements of the women's stories. If you agree, please advise.

Thanks,

Antoinette Allen
Old Dominion University
Aalle038@odu.edu

RE: Request for artist permission to use Sunday Conversations

ANTOINETTE ALLEN

<aalle038@odu.edu>

Apr 28

to

lonnieostudio75

Greetings,

I am seeking permission to include your image in my college dissertation. I am completing my doctoral degree at ODU. I am researching three Black women and using their stories to share their leadership experiences. Your painting "Sunday Conversation" has been instrumental in my research as several of the women could identify with the image and the women. Thank you for capturing these women and sharing their story.

Would you mind sharing with me what your inspiration was for the painting. If you give me permission to include a copy of your picture in my writing, I will just use an image off the internet to show the image and give you credit for your work. Once my dissertation is published, you will be able to share that your art has been used in academic research. It would look like this on the page.

Thank you so much for your consideration,

Antoinette Allen
Old Dominion University
Norfolk, VA



April 30, 2017

Yes you have my permission to use the print. Thanks you.

Lonnie Ollivierre
lonnieostudio75@aol.com



ANTOINETTE ALLEN <aalle038@odu.edu>

Fwd: Wings - request for use

Wed, May 17, 2017 at 10:26 AM

Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

From: gwen gorby <gwengorby@yahoo.com>
 Date: May 17, 2017 at 8:24:33 AM EDT
 To: Antoinette Allen <
 Subject: Re: Wings - request for use
 Reply-To: gwen gorby <gwengorby@yahoo.com>

Hi Antoinette,

Yes, you have my permission to use my painting "Wings". I am thrilled that it spoke to you. Her name was Velma. She was a temp that showed up at my work. One day, she had torn up a t-shirt and wrapped her hair. When I saw her, I thought she looked like an angel... a mothering angel that radiated the strength and beauty within all women. Velma was a single mom and was doing everything she could to provide for her children. She also was a Christian and her faith was the source of her strength. When I told a friend I thought Velma looked like a painting, my friend asked Velma for me if I could take her picture to paint. Velma met me on a 10 minute break and I painted her shortly after. Velma was a very shy person and she was flattered by the painting. She moved away and I have lost touch with her. She was and always will be a gift to me from God and I am grateful that the painting speaks to people. Your email is inspiration for me.

Thank you!
 Gwen Gorby

From: Antoinette Allen <
 To: gwengorby@ytingahoo.com
 Sent: Saturday, May 13, 2017 3:11 PM
 Subject: Wings - request for use

Greetings,

I am a doctoral student at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, VA. I am finishing my dissertation and will be presenting my findings this June. My research focused on Black women leaders in the federal government. I am using your art piece "Wings" to represent the collective portrait of the women in my research.

That image spoke to me and epitomized some of the women's journey. I would like to include your portrait in my paper to visually depict their journey. I am seeking your permission to use your image, and will credit your work. I would just use an image

off of the internet, if allowed. If not, I will just cite links to where it can be found and describe it. I have received permission from two other artists that will also have their art work included.

Lastly, would you mind telling me about your inspiration for this photo or the woman?

Thank you so much,

Antoinette Allen
aalle038@odu.edu

RE: Request permission to use The Islanders

Question about "The Islanders"

Feb 12

Greetings,

My name is Antoinette Allen, I am a doctoral student at Old Dominion University in Virginia. I am writing my dissertation and am infusing art into my research. I am essentially researching the leadership of African American women leaders in the U.S. federal government. I am using a methodology known as "portraiture" in which the researcher attempts to paint a portrait of the research subjects.

I have completed my research and based upon the findings I am using your piece "The islanders" as my final portrait, because it perfectly captures these Black women journeys as they have explained them to me. I am hoping you would provide me a brief idea of what your inspiration was for this piece and what it depicts to you, the original artist. I would like to include it in my dissertation to give honor to your work.

For years, I have collected various pieces of your art. I am a dancer and have several of your dance pieces. I plan to use "The Islanders" to describe the walk each of these women including myself has taken to obtain the leadership positions they have. The covered faces of the women speaks to how they have often felt hidden.

Thank you for considering my request. I have greatly enjoyed your art work.

Antoinette Allen
(804) 647-2628
 Richmond, VA



lavarne
ross

Feb
13

They are Moslem women from east Africa, their faces are uncovered because they don't like looking at them. (like a fly on the wall, so to speak)

Antoinette Allen < >

Jul 25 (4 days ago)

Mr. Ross,

Thank you for responding. Do I have your permission to include your portrait of the Bajun Islanders in my dissertation? I have cut and paste the image from the internet and included it in my document.

Thank you,

Antoinette Allen



lavarne ross

Jul 26 (3 days ago)

to
me

yes you do, thank you for asking.

Lavarne Ross

Talk Coordinator
Belleaire Woods Congregation, Flint, MI

Permission to use Patterson and Kelleher's Resilience Cycle figure

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Format	Print, Electronic
Portion	chart/graph/table/figure
Number of charts/graphs/tables/figures	1
Title or numeric reference of the portion(s)	The Resilient Cycle figure 5.1
Title of the article or chapter the portion is from	The Resilient Cycle
Editor of portion(s)	n/a
Author of portion(s)	Antoinette Allen
Volume of serial or monograph.	n/a
Issue, if republishing an article from a serial	n/a
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Expected publication date	Jul 2017
Estimated size (pages)	204
Total (may include CCC user fee)	0.00 USD
Terms and Conditions	

Appendix F

Permission to conduct Doctoral research



OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH



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Norfolk, Virginia 23508

Mailing Address

Office of Research
1 Old Dominion University
Norfolk, Virginia 23529
Phone(757) 683-3460
Fax(757) 683-6902

DATE: November 27, 2016

TO: Melva Grant, PHD

FROM: Old Dominion University Education Human Subjects Review Committee

PROJECT TITLE: [905802-1] When I see my face:Painting the portrait of Black women leaders in the federal government

REFERENCE #:

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS

DECISION DATE: November 27, 2016

REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category # [6.2]

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Old Dominion University Education Human Subjects Review Committee has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulations.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records.

If you have any questions, please contact Petros Katsioloudis at (757) 683-5323 or pkatsiol@odu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Old Dominion University Education Human Subjects Review Committee's records.

VITA

Antoinette LaVawn Allen, PHR
1551 Old Oakland Road
Henrico, VA 23231

Educational Background:

Ph. D. 2017, Old Dominion University - Education
 M.S. 2001, Cameron University – Behavioral Science
 B.A.S. 1997, Mount Olive College – Human Resource Development
 A.A.S. 1995, Community College of the Air Force – Logistics Management

Experience:

2017 – Present	Program Analyst, Office of Personnel Management, Charlottesville, VA
2010 – 2017	Administrative Officer, Department of Justice, Richmond, VA
2006 – 2010	Equal Opportunity Officer, Virginia Army National Guard, Sandston, VA
2005 – 2006	HR Consultant, City of Richmond Police Department, Richmond VA
2001 – 2014	Logistics Officer/ Personnel Officer OK/DC/VA Air National Guard
1997 – 2000	HR Generalist, Telos Corporation, Ashburn, VA
1993 – 1997	Logistics Readiness Spec., U.S. Air Force, Seymour Johnson AFB, NC

Professional Organizations:

Federal Executive Institute Alumni Association
 Nominated for Golden Key International Honor Society membership
 International Leadership Association
 Society for Human Resource Management
 Virginia National Guard Officer's Association

Published Works:

Allen, A. (2017). Leadership Lessons through the Eyes of the Three Blind Mice. *Federal Manager*, 37 (3), 12-16.

Allen, A. (2017). It's Time for a New Pair of Shoes: Reflections on Authentic Leadership. *Executive Summary: Newsletter for the Federal Executive Institute Alumni Association*, June 2017(430), 3.

Allen, A. (2012). Book Review: Acting White: The Curious Case of a Racial Slur. *Ethnicity and Race in a Changing World: A Review Journal*, 3 (1), 48-50.